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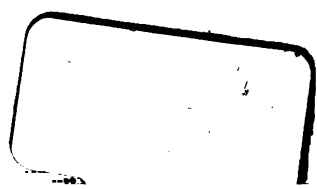
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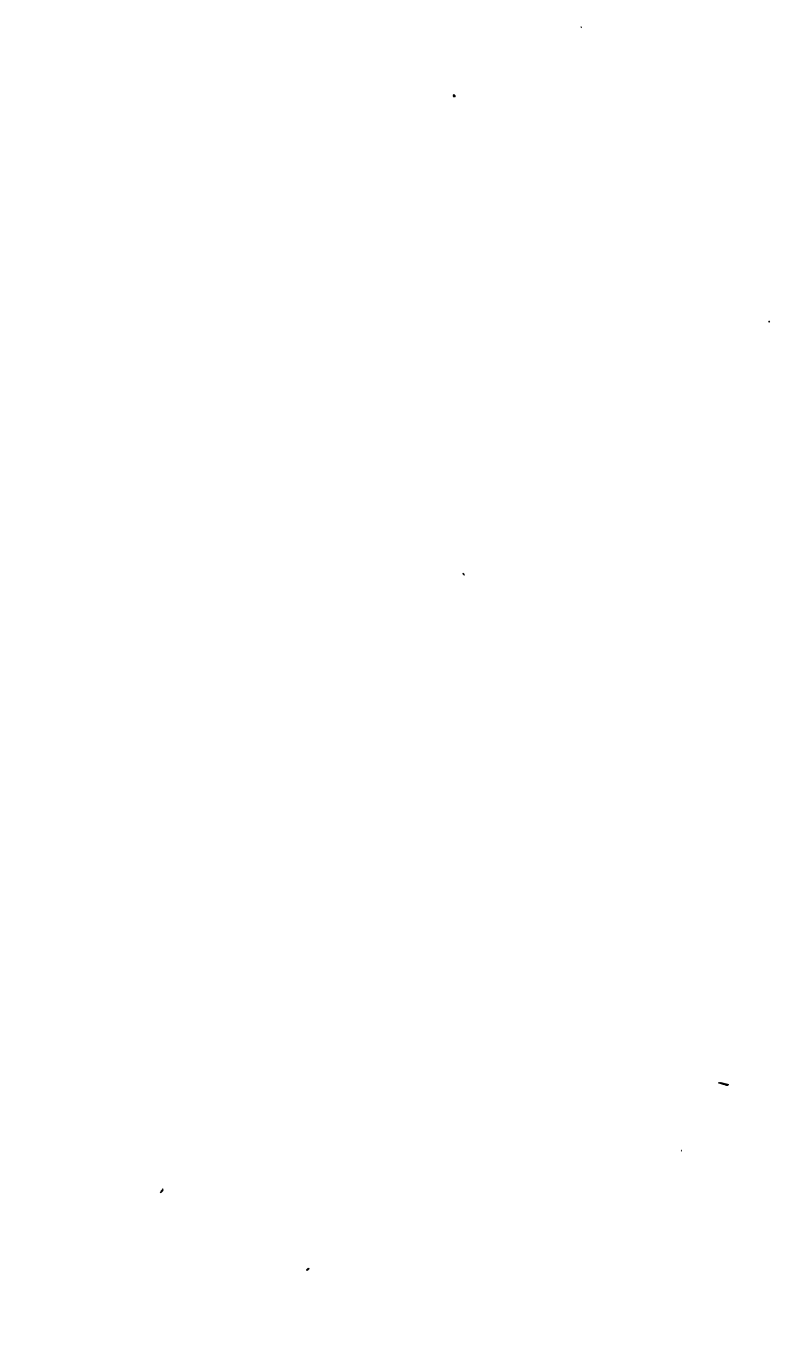
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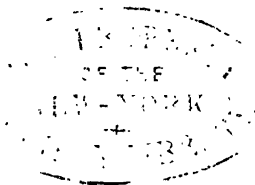




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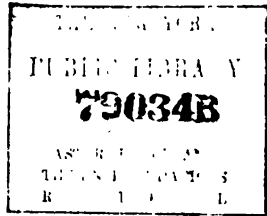
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TO
My Dear Friend,
KNOWN IN AMERICA AND ENGLAND AS
GRACE GREENWOOD,
I INSCRIBE THIS LITTLE VOLUME,
AND BEG HER TO ACCEPT THE DEDICATION
AS A FEEDLE TRIBUTE OF
MY ADMIRATION OF HER GENIUS,
AND AFFECTION FOR HERSELF.

C. C.

Blackheath, August, 1852.



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ENGLISH TALES AND SKETCHES.

LADY LUCY'S SECRET.

'With clamorous demands of debt, broken bonds,
And the detention of long-since-due debts,
Against my honor.' — TIMON OF ATHENS.

'How in the turmoil of life can love stand,
Where there is not one heart, and one mouth, and one hand ?'
LONGFELLOW.

In a charming morning-room of a charming London house, neighboring Hyde-Park, there lounged over the breakfast-table a wedded pair,—the rich merchant Ferrars, and his young wife, the Lady Lucy. Five years of married life had, in most respects, more than realized the brightest hopes which had been born and cherished in the dreaming days of courtship. Till the age of forty, the active mind of Walter Ferrars had been chiefly occupied by business,—not in mean, shuffling, speculative dealings, but on the broad basis of large transactions and an almost chivalrous system of integrity.

Then, when a secured position and the privileges of wealth had introduced him to that inner circle of English society which not wealth *alone* can penetrate,

but where wealth in some due proportion is an element necessary to hold fast a place, it was thought most natural and proper that he should choose a wife from the class which seems set apart from the rest of womankind like the choice flowers of a conservatory, on whom no rude breath must blow. The youthful, but nearly portionless, daughter of a poor Earl seemed the very bride decreed by some good angel for the merchant-prince.

But though the nuptials fulfilled nearly all the requirements of a *mariage de convenance*, there was in reality very much more of the ingredients in their hearts which amalgamate into very genuine 'love,' than always meet at the altar; though of course 'the World' resolutely refused to believe anything of the sort—the World, which is capable of so much kindness, and goodness, and justice, among its individuals, taken 'separately and singly,' and yet is such a false, malignant, many-headed monster in its corporate body! Walter Ferrars had a warm heart, that yearned for affection, as well as a clear head; and, fascinated as he had been by the youthful grace and beauty, the high-bred repose of manner, and cultivated talents of the Lady Lucy, he set himself resolutely to win and keep her girlish heart, not expecting that the man of forty was to obtain it without an effort. Thus, when he assumed a husband's name, he did not 'drop the lover.' His was still the watchful care, made up of the thousand little thoughtful kindnesses of daily-life, neither relaxed in a *tête-à-tête*, nor increased in public. He was the pleased and ready escort for every occasion, save only when some imperative business claimed

his time and presence ; and these calls now were rare, for he had long since arrived at the position when efficient servants and assistants carry out the plans a superior has organized.

Is there wonder that the wife was grateful ? Few — few women indeed are insensible to the power of continued kindness ; they may have a heart of stone for the impetuous impulsive lover, but habitual tenderness — that seems so unselfish — touches the finest chords of their nature, and awakens affection that might have lain dormant through a long life, but for this one sweet influence. Thus it was that the wife of five years loved her husband with an almost adoring worship. She had felt her own mind expand in the intimate communion with his fine intellect ; she had felt her own weaknesses grow less, as if she had absorbed some of his strength of character ; and she had recognised the very dawn of principles and opinions which had been unknown to her in the days of her thoughtless, ignorant, inexperienced girlhood. And yet with all her love, with all her matured intelligence, she had never lost a certain awe of her husband, which his seniority had perhaps first implanted, and alas ! one fatal circumstance had gone far to render morbid.

They sat at breakfast. It was early spring, and though the sunshine streamed through the windows, and from one of them there crept the odors of the conservatory, a bright fire gleamed and crackled in the grate, and shed a charm of cheerfulness through the room. Mr. Ferrars had a newspaper in his hand, but not yet had he perused a line, for his son and heir, a brave boy of three years old, a very model of patrician

beauty, was climbing his large chair, playing antics of many sorts, and even affecting to pull his father's still rich and curling hair, so little awe had the young Walter of the head of the house — while Mr. Ferrars' parental glee was like a deep bass to the child's crowing laugh. Lady Lucy smiled too, but she shook her head, and said more than once, 'Naughty papa is spoiling Watty.' It was a pretty scene; the room was redolent of elegance, and the young mother, in her exquisitely simple but tasteful morning dress, was one of its chief ornaments. Who would think that beneath all this sweetness of life there was still a serpent!

A post was just in, and a servant entered with several letters; among those delivered to Lady Lucy were two or three large unsightly, ill-shaped epistles, that seemed strange company for the others. An observing stranger might have noticed that Lady Lucy's cheek paled, and then flushed; that she crushed up her letters together, without immediately opening them, and that presently she slid the ugly ones into the pocket of her satin apron. Mr. Ferrars read his almost with a glance — for they were masculine letters, laconic, and to the point, conveying necessary information, in three lines and a half — and he smiled, as after a while he observed his wife apparently intent on a truly feminine epistle — four sides of delicate paper closely crossed — and exclaimed gaily,

'My dear Lucy, there's an hour's reading for you, at least; so I shall ring and send Watty to the nursery, and settle steadily to the *Times*.'

But though Lady Lucy really perused the letter,

her mind refused to retain the pleasant chit-chat gossip it contained. Her thoughts were far away, and had she narrowly examined her motives, she would have known that she bent over the friendly sheet chiefly as an excuse for silence, and to conceal her passing emotions. Meanwhile the newspaper gently crackled in her husband's hand as he moved its broad leaves.

Presently Mr. Ferrars started with an exclamation of grief and astonishment that completely roused his absent wife.

'My dear Walter, what has happened?' she asked, with real anxiety.

'A man a bankrupt, whom I thought as safe as the Bank of England. Though it is true, people talked about him months ago — spoke suspiciously of his personal extravagance, and, above all, said that his wife was ruining him.'

'His wife!'

'Yes; but I cannot understand that sort of thing. A few hundreds a year more or less could be of little moment to a man like Beaufort, and I don't suppose she spent more than you do, my darling. At any rate, she was never better dressed. Yet I believe the truth was, that she got frightfully into debt unknown to him; and debt is a sort of thing that multiplies itself in a most astonishing manner, and sows by the wayside the seeds of all sorts of misery. Then people say that when pay-day came at last, bickerings ensued, their domestic happiness was broken up, Beaufort grew reckless, and plunged into the excitement of the maddest speculations.'

'How dreadful!' murmured Lady Lucy.'

‘Dreadful, indeed! I don’t know what I should do with such a wife.’

‘Would not you forgive her if you loved her very much?’ asked Lady Lucy, and she spoke in the singularly calm tone of suppressed emotion.

‘Once, perhaps, once; and if her fault were the fault of youthful inexperience,—but so much falseness, mean deception, and mental deterioration must have accompanied such transactions, that—in short, I thank Heaven that I have never been put to the trial.’

As he spoke, the eyes of Mr. Ferrars were fixed on the leading article of the Times, not on his wife. Presently Lady Lucy glided from the room, without her absence being at the moment observed. Once in her dressing-room, she turned the key, and sinking into a low chair, gave vent to her grief in some of the bitterest tears she had ever shed. She, too, was in debt; ‘frightfully,’ her husband had used the right word; ‘hopelessly,’ so far as satisfying her creditors, even out of the large allowance Mr. Ferrars made her; and still she had not the courage voluntarily to tell the truth, which yet she knew must burst upon him ere long. From what small beginnings had this Upas shadow come upon her! And what ‘falseness, mean deception, and mental deterioration’ had truly been hers!

Even the fancied relief of weeping was a luxury denied to her, for she feared to show the evidence of tears; thus after a little while she strove to drive them back, and by bathing her face before the glass, and drawing the braids of her soft hair a little nearer her eyes, she was tolerably successful in hiding their

trace. Never, when dressing for court or gala, had she consulted her mirror so closely ; and now, though the tears were dried, she was shocked at the lines of anguish — those delvers of the wrinkles of age — which marked her countenance. She sat before her looking-glass, one hand supporting her head, the other clutching the hidden letters which she had not yet the courage to open. There was a light tap at the door.

‘ Who is there ? ’ inquired Lady Lucy.

‘ It is I, my lady,’ replied Harris, her faithful maid.
‘ Madame Dalmas is here.’

Lady Lucy unlocked her door, and gave orders that the visitor should be shown up. With the name had come a flush of hope that some trifling temporary help would be hers. Madame Dalmas called herself a Frenchwoman, and signed herself ‘ Antoinette,’ but she was really an English Jewess of low extraction, whose true name was Sarah Solomons. Her ‘ profession ’ was to purchase — and sell — the cast-off apparel of ladies of fashion ; and few of the sisterhood have carried the art of double cheating to so great a proficiency. With always a roll of bank notes in her old leathern pocket-book, and always a dirty canvas bag full of bright sovereigns in her pocket, she had ever the subtle temptation for her victims ready.

Madame Dalmas — for she must be called according to the name engraved on her card — was a little meanly-dressed woman of about forty, with bright eyes and a hooked nose, a restless shuffling manner, and an ill-pitched voice. Her jargon was a mixture of bad French and worse English.

‘ Bon jour miladi Lucy,’ she exclaimed as she

entered Lady Lucy's sanctum, 'need not inquire of health, you look si charmante. Oh, si belle! — that make you wear old clothes so longer dan oder ladies, and have so leetel for me to buy. Milady Lucy Ferrars know she look well in anyting, but yet she should not wear old clothes: no right — for example — for de trade, and de hoosband always like de wife well dressed — ha — ha !'

Poor Lady Lucy! Too sick at heart to have any relish for Madame Dalmas' nauseous compliments, and more than half aware of her cheats and falsehoods, she yet tolerated the creature from her own dire necessities.

'Sit down, Madame Dalmas,' she said, 'I am dreadfully in want of money; but I really don't know what I have for you.'

'De green velvet, which you not let me have before Easter, I still give you four pounds for it, though perhaps you worn it very much since then.'

'Only twice — only seven times in all — and it cost me twenty guineas,' sighed Lady Lucy.

'Ah, but so old-fashioned — I do believe I not see my money for it. Voyez-vous, de Lady Lucy is one petite lady — si jolie mais très petite. If she were de tall grand lady, you see de great dresses could fit small lady, but de leetle dresses fit but ver few.'

'If I sell the green velvet I must have another next winter,' murmured Lady Lucy.

'Ah! — vous avez raison — when de season nouveautés come in. I tell you what — you let me have also de white lace robe you show me once, the same time I bought from you one little old pearl brooch.'

‘My wedding-dress? Oh no, I cannot sell my wedding-dress!’ exclaimed poor Lady Lucy, pressing her hands convulsively together.

‘What for not? — you not want to marry over again — I give you twenty-two pounds for it.’

‘Twenty-two pounds! — why, it is Brussels point, and cost a hundred and twenty.’

‘Ah, I know — but you forget I perhaps keep it ten years and not sell — and besides you buy dear; great lady often buy ver dear!’ and Madame Dalmas shook her head with the solemnity of a sage.

‘No, no; I cannot sell my wedding-dress,’ again murmured the wife. And be it recorded the temptress, for once, was baffled; but, at the expiration of an hour, Madame Dalmas left the house, with a huge bundle under her arm, and a quiet satisfaction revealed in her countenance, had any one thought it worth while to study the expression of her disagreeable face.

Again Lady Lucy locked her door, and placing a bank note and some sovereigns on the table, she sank into a low chair, and while a few large silent tears flowed down her cheeks, she at last found courage to open the three letters which had hitherto remained, unread, in her apron pocket. The first, — the second seemed to contain nothing to surprise her, however much there might be to annoy; but it was different with the last; here was a gross overcharge, and perhaps it was not with quite a disagreeable feeling that Lady Lucy found something of which she could justly complain. She rose hurriedly and unlocked a small writing-desk, which had long been used as a receptacle for old letters and accounts.

To tell the truth, the interior of the desk did not present a very orderly arrangement. Cards of address, bills paid and unpaid, copies of verses, and papers of many descriptions, were huddled together, and it was not by any means surprising that Lady Lucy failed in her search for the original account by which to rectify the error in her shoemaker's bill. In the hurry and nervous trepidation which had latterly become almost a constitutional ailment with her, she turned out the contents of the writing-desk into an easy chair, and then kneeling before it, she set herself to the task of carefully examining the papers. Soon she came to one letter which had been little expected in that place, and which still bore the marks of a rose, whose withered leaves also remained, that had been put away in its folds. The rose Walter Ferrars had given her on the eve of their marriage, and the letter was in his handwriting, and bore but a few days earlier date. With quickened pulses she opened the envelope, and though a mist rose before her eyes, it seemed to form into a mirror in which she saw the by-gone hours. And so she read — and read.

It is the fashion to laugh at love-letters, perhaps because only the silly ones ever come to light. With the noblest of both sexes such effusions are sacred, and would be profaned by the perusal of a third person; but when a warm and true heart is joined to a manly intellect; when reason sanctions and constancy maintains the choice which has been made, there is little doubt that much of simple, truthful, touching eloquence is often to be found in a 'lover's' letter. That which the wife now perused with strange and mingled feelings

was evidently a reply to some girlish depreciation of herself, and contained these words : —

‘ You tell me that in the scanty years of your past life, you already look back on a hundred follies, and that you have unnumbered faults of character at which I do not even guess. Making some allowance for a figurative expression, I will answer “ it may be so.” What then ? I have never called you an angel, and never desired you to be perfect. The weaknesses which cling, tendril-like, to a fine nature, not unfrequently bind us to it by ties we do not seek to sever. I know you for a true-hearted girl, but with the bitter lessons of life still unlearned ; let it be my part to shield you from their sad knowledge, — yet whatever sorrow or evil falls upon you, I must or ought to share. Let us have no secrets ; and while the Truth which gives its purest lustre to your eye, and its richest rose to your cheek, still reigns in your soul, I cannot dream of a fault grave enough to deserve harsher rebuke than the kiss of forgiveness.’

What lines to read at such a moment ! No wonder their meaning reached her mind far differently than it had done when they were first received. Then she could have little heeded it ; witness how carelessly the letter had been put away — how forgotten had been its contents.

Her tears flowed in torrents, but Lucy Ferrars no longer strove to check them. And yet there gleamed through them a brighter smile than had visited her countenance for many a month. A resolve approved by all her better nature was growing firm within her heart ; and that which an hour before would have

seemed too dreadful to contemplate was losing half its terrors. How often an ascent, which looks in the distance a bare precipice, shows us, when we approach its face, the notches by which we may climb! — and not a few of the difficulties of life yield to our will when we bravely encounter them.

‘Why did I fear him so much?’ murmured Lady Lucy to herself. ‘I ought not to have needed such an assurance as this to throw myself at his feet, and bear even scorn and rebuke, rather than prolong the reign of falsehood and deceit. Yes — yes,’ and gathering a heap of papers in her hand with the ‘love-letter’ beneath them, she descended the stairs.

There is no denying that Lady Lucy paused at the library door — no denying that her heart beat quickly, and her breath seemed well-nigh spent; but she was right to act on the good impulse, and not wait until the new-born courage should sink.

Mr. Ferrars had finished the newspaper, and was writing an important note; his back was to the door, and hearing the rustle of his wife’s dress, and knowing her step, he did not turn his head sufficiently to observe her countenance, but he said, good-humoredly,

‘At last! What have you been about? I thought we were to go out before luncheon to look at the bracelet I mentioned to you.’

‘No, Walter — no bracelet — you must never give me any jewels again;’ and as Lady Lucy spoke, she leaned against a chair for support. At such words her husband turned quickly round, started up, and exclaimed,

‘Lucy, my love! — in tears — what has happened?’

and, finding that even when he wound his arm round her she still was mute, he continued, 'Speak — this silence breaks my heart — what have I done to lose your confidence ?'

'Not you — I —' gasped the wife. 'Your words at breakfast — this letter — have rolled the stone from my heart — I must confess — the truth — I am like Mrs. Beaufort — in debt — frightfully in debt.' And with a gesture, as if she would crush herself into the earth, she slipped from his arms and sank literally on the floor.

Whatever pang Mr. Ferrars felt at the knowledge of her fault, it seemed overpowered by the sense of her present anguish — an anguish that proved how bitter had been the expiation ; and he lifted his wife to a sofa, bent over her with fondness, called her by all the dear pet names to which her ear was accustomed, and nearer twenty times than once gave her the 'kiss of forgiveness.'

'And it is of you I have been frightened !' cried Lady Lucy, clinging to his hand. 'You who I thought would never make any excuses for faults you yourself could not have committed !'

'I have never been tempted.'

'Have I ? I dare not say so.'

'Tell me how it all came about,' said Mr. Ferrars, drawing her to him, 'tell me from the beginning.'

But his gentleness unnerved her — she felt choking — loosened the collar of her dress for breathing space — and gave him the knowledge he asked in broken exclamations.

'Before I was married — it — began. They persuaded me so many — oh, so many — unnecessary

things were—needed. Then they would not send the bills—and I—for a long time—never knew—what I owed—and then—and then—I thought I should have the power—but—’

‘Your allowance was not sufficient?’ asked Mr. Ferrars, pressing her hand as he spoke.

‘Oh, yes, yes, yes! most generous, and yet it was always forestalled to pay old bills; and then—and then my wants were so many. I was so weak. Madame Dalmas has had dresses I could have worn when I had new ones on credit instead, and—and Harris has had double wages to compensate for what a lady’s maid thinks her perquisites; even articles I might have given to poor gentlewomen I have been mean enough to sell. Oh, Walter! I have been very wrong; but I have been miserable for at least three years. I have felt as if an iron cage were rising round me—from which you only could free me—and yet, till to-day, I think I could have died rather than confess to you.’

‘My poor girl! Why should you have feared me? Have I ever been harsh?’

‘Oh, no!—no—but you are so just—so strict in all these things—’

‘I hope I am; and yet not the less do I understand how all this has come about. Now, Lucy,—now that you have ceased to fear me—tell me the amount.’

She strove to speak, but could not.

‘Three figures or four? tell me.’

‘I am afraid—yes, I am afraid four,’ murmured Lady Lucy, and hiding her face from his view; ‘yes, four figures, and my quarter received last week gone, every penny.’

‘Lucy, every bill shall be paid this day ; but you must reward me by being happy.’

‘Generous ! dearest ! But, Walter, if you had been a poor man, what then ? ’

‘Ah, Lucy, that would have been a very different and an infinitely sadder story. Instead of the relinquishment of some indulgence hardly to be missed, there might have been ruin, and poverty, and disgrace. You have one excuse, — at least you knew that I could pay at last.’

‘Ah, but at what a price ! The price of your love and confidence.’

‘No, Lucy, — for your confession has been voluntary ; and I will not ask myself what I should have felt if the knowledge come from another. After all, you have fallen to a temptation which besets the wives of the rich far more than those of poor or struggling gentlemen. Tradespeople are shrewd enough in one respect — they do not press their commodities and long credit in quarters where ultimate payment seems doubtful — though — ’

‘They care not what domestic misery they create among the rich,’ interrupted Lady Lucy, bitterly.

‘Stay : there are faults on both sides, not the least of them being that girls in your station are too rarely taught the value of money, or that integrity in money matters should be to them a point of honor second only to one other. Now listen, my darling, before we dismiss this painful subject for ever. You have the greatest confidence in your maid, and *entre nous* she must be a good deal in the secret. We shall bribe her to discretion, however, by dismissing Madame

Dalmas at once and for ever. As soon as you can spare Harris, I will send her to change a cheque at Coutts', and then, for expedition and security, she shall take on the brougham and make a round to these tradespeople. Meanwhile, I will drive you in the phaeton to look at the bracelet.'

'Oh, no — no, dear Walter, not the bracelet.'

'Yes — yes — I say yes. Though not a quarrel, this is a sorrow which has come between us, and there must be a peace-offering. Besides I would not have you think that you had reached the limits of my will, and of my means to gratify you.'

'To think that I could have doubted — that I could have feared you!' sobbed Lady Lucy, as tears of joy coursed down her cheeks. 'But, Walter, it is not every husband who would have shown such generosity.'

'I think there are few husbands, Lucy, who do not estimate truth and candor as among the chief of conjugal virtues: — ah, had you confided in me when first you felt the bondage of debt, how much anguish would have been spared you!'

GERALDINE — A LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

'While youth's keen light is in thine eye,
While each new hour goes dancing by,
While girlish visions are not gone,
And sorrow is almost unknown —' S. R.

GERALDINE HARMER was an only child, and had been petted, caressed, beloved — indulged, if you will, and what the world calls 'spoiled,' from infancy. But there is a wiser and better creed than that of the world in general; and it is, that no human being can be spoiled by the government of kindness and affection, be they ever so lavish and warm. One thing, however, it does; just as sunshine develops the color of flowers and leaves which would have been pale and sickly in the shade, it draws out the deep hues and lines of character; and it may be that the selfishness of the selfish becomes more apparent when such a nature is the recipient of life's choicest blessings. But who can think of the myriad hearts in which the noblest qualities, the purest aspirations, and even the most world-enriching talents lie buried like seeds in an Egyptian tomb, for want of the light and heat the affections alone can bestow, and yet grieve for their rays shining — even though they chance to fall sometimes on unworthy objects!

Beautiful as was Geraldine's developed character, I believe her to have been only an average type of her sex, if its early influences were more commonly as favorable. With all the softness and tenderness which belong of right to a woman, she possessed that moral bravery which is sure to be extinguished by a discipline of *fear*, and which for this reason is one of the rarest attributes of character. For my own part, I never hear a harsh word spoken to a child without trembling for the consequences, without dreading that the bloom of perfect and proud integrity may at that moment be brushed away, and the first thoughts of deceit be fanned into being.

Geraldine was about seventeen when she lost her mother; and henceforth home-love seemed centred in her remaining parent. Friends may be very dear, acquaintances pleasant and instructive companions; but it is round our very hearth, under the roof where we rest, and in the daily, hourly intercourse of life, that the heart must either be satisfied or not; and human happiness, or a blank where it should be, exist. Blessed Geraldine! still, still for her was home affection. Even grief for the dead, deep, intense as it was, had a gleam of light about it that was not borrowed from sorrow; like the dark clouds that we often see tinged with a golden sunshine. Every memory of her mother was sweet and sacred; of peace and of gladness. It was at this period that Mr. Harmer changed his residence from an inland town to the coast of Devon. Perhaps local associations have more influence upon us than we are always ready to admit. Geraldine's childhood had been passed amid the soft rich scenery of the heart of

England, where meadows show their brightest, deepest green, and the affluent earth is most lavish of its treasures; where blooming orchards look like the flower gardens of some gigantic world, and the ripening corn sways heavily in the breeze, drooping beneath the weight of its growing wealth; where the sunny hills and the fertile valleys and the gentle streams look up to a changeful sky — to them most benignant — with a fond and grateful smile! The scene had surely been in unison with her own happy, joyous, careless childhood.

Life is broken up into the epochs that emotions make, far more vividly than by the lines of outward actions or events; though often enough they mould, or melt into, one another. The death of her mother was Geraldine's first sorrow, speedily followed by the change to a sea-side residence; and this — the perpetual presence of the wide horizon, the changeful, restless, slumbering, treacherous ocean, was beautifully appropriate to the new life which was dawning upon her. That one sorrow had opened the dark door through which so much knowledge steals into the heart; that knowledge taught by suffering, which is the balance in the scale, and forbids even hope to soar too high. Yet she was at the age when, despite all the world can do, life will ever wear a new and bright aspect, if not the brightest Fate has in store. And as Geraldine sat on the sea-shore, watching the glancing waves that broke at her feet, her musings took that tinge of poetry of which few natures are quite incapable. Sometimes it seemed as if each wave had a story it refused to tell — a tale from the distant climes,

whence it had toiled on some strange mysterious mission ; or as she marked the gently rising tide, obedient to the mistress of the waters, who beckoned from her starry court, her soul seemed lifted by that worship of nature, most reverent as it was, till she saw or created a thousand vague yet beautiful types.

It must not be supposed, however, that Geraldine Harmer's life was that of a recluse, or that she grew to be a mere visionary ; far otherwise ; for the next six or seven years she mixed a good deal in society, and paid at least one visit in the year to the metropolis. Observation confirmed or contradicted the theories of her young mind ; and in her father's constant society and confiding affection she had that support, the absence of which is, I believe, the most fatal deprivation a young woman can know — the support of a stronger mind, and more enlarged intellect than her own ; that something which she recognises most speedily, and bows to most implicitly, in father, brother, or husband. The metaphor of the oak and the ivy, as applied to the two natures, is beautiful, because it contains so much truth ; and woman's fine qualities are only half developed while tottering as it were by herself. There is but one condition more pitiable, and that is when she twines herself round some rotten reed, corrupts her own soul by the contact, and sinks into the very mire at last. But the girl who nestles by the side of a wise yet gentle father, or who has the proud privilege of a noble brother's tender friendship, is sheltered from a thousand dangers and temptations. She will be the last to 'lose' her heart unworthily, though she may bestow it entirely and wisely.

Not driven therefore to any fatal choice by the want of an object to venerate and rely on — so large an element in the *besoin d'aimer* — there is not much wonder that at three-and-twenty Geraldine's heart was still free. It might have been open to those passing thoughts and inclinations, which are but as the summer lightning that indicates the pathway of the storm ; for youth will have its dreams, and the heart its own promptings. But her peace had never been broken ; her soul was yet ignorant of its deepest mysteries.

It was at this time that the accidents of society threw her a good deal with Lionel Weymouth ; acquaintance ripened into intimacy both with father and daughter ; and intimacy into a friendship founded on mutual appreciation and esteem. Weymouth was two or three years older than Geraldine, and, until a recent period, had expected to inherit a fine landed property in the north of England. Without exactly pledging himself to celibacy, Sir George Weymouth had educated the orphan children of his younger brother under his own roof ; and, to say the least, had permitted the world to look upon Lionel as his acknowledged heir. He, however, was not insensible to the precarious tenure of his fortunes, and from boyhood had desired to establish himself in a profession. Sir George proposed a military career, one which almost always presents some points of fascination to a youth of nineteen ; and Lionel, whose mind had no very early development, was more than content with the choice. A commission was purchased in one of those regiments whose officers are chiefly supplied from the ranks of the aristocracy ; and family pride, together with a true regard for his


nephew, induced Sir George to make him a yearly allowance fully suitable to the maintenance of the position in which he had placed him. Meanwhile the two sisters remained under his almost parental protection ; and Laura at eighteen took the head of her uncle's table.

The doctrine of 'Destiny' is charmingly satisfactory when some perfectly unexpected disaster, of which we have been the blind instruments, takes place. The feelings of Laura and Marian Weymouth were entirely a case in point, when, suddenly, without more preparation than a day or two's vague suspicion, they discovered that their sedate, grey-headed uncle, of fifty-five, was actually in love with, and had proposed to marry, their school companion, their beautiful friend, Emily Dalton ! For this result had she been their guest for weeks at a time. Emily belonged to what is called 'a good family ;' but she was one of the many children of a 'younger son.' Half-a-dozen sisters and three brothers must ultimately divide with her his slender fortune ; but she had been educated in a worldly school, and had always looked on marriage as the stepping-stone to fortune. It had become a by-word in her home, though always uttered *sotto voce*, that love was a luxury reserved for the rich, and romantic reveries an indulgence for the well-endowed. Surely this was precisely the girl to accept, with self-gratulation, the hand of an elderly baronet of large fortune ! Whether by skilful flatteries and evident partiality she had sought it, is another question.

The marriage was a hasty one ; for there was no reason for delay. Laura and Marian were brides-

maids ; but though not above a hundred miles distant at the time, Lionel was not invited to the wedding. The omission did not arise from any ill or unkind feeling on the bridegroom's part ; very far from it. The truth was, the most unpleasant task he had ever imposed on himself was writing to his nephew the intelligence of his intentions ; and Lionel's presence at the wedding breakfast would have been like that of the skeleton at a feast. Yet, after all, there was no wrong in his purpose : he had acted for years a father's part to his brother's children ; nor did he now intend to desert them ; he was only taking upon himself those duties which the ' world ' had expected from him thirty years before.

Lionel saw the event in this its true light ; but he had none the less a just perception of the change it effected in his own prospects. In the depths of his heart he had for some time felt that his vocation should not have been a military one ; though, out of deference to his uncle's feelings, he had been silent on the subject of his discontent. As his character matured, there sprang up restless energies which revolted at the effeminate existence of a carpet soldier ; while at the same time his mind sickened at the associations of active service, and disputed the ' honor ' of being a legalized slaughterer. But now he determined to sell his commission, and woo fortune in some more congenial path. Soon after the marriage he communicated his wishes to his uncle, who, though a little surprised, raised no opposition ; and when Lionel, acknowledging his obligations, yet gave expression to his ardent desire for independence, Sir George easily



yielded to his proposal for curtailing to the most necessary trifle his hitherto handsome allowance. In truth, wealthy as the baronet was, he had already discovered many new channels which were delving themselves for his money, and as ordinary characters ever do, gave up a thousand generous resolves under the pressure of altered circumstances.

It was after Lionel Weymouth had left the army, and during the months which preceded his embarkation for India—that land of golden promise, where he had formed a connection with a mercantile establishment—that he met Geraldine Harmer. The regard which sprung up between them was not of that rapid growth and demonstrative nature which speedily brings about a climax, and not unfrequently dies out as quickly. But silently and gradually it pervaded the heart of each; implanting fresh hopes therein, and giving its own hue to life. And yet not a word of this love had been spoken between them; nay, Lionel considered that his attempt to conceal his affection had been in a great measure successful. He had marked out for himself a career, a goal to be reached. Not until his sisters were either married or endowed by him with independence, and not until he had won a fortune to lay at her feet, would he seek Geraldine's love, or sue for her hand. During the long years of his absence she should be free: without blame if she forgot him—without remorse if she wedded another. Perhaps, in the long run, this code of honor works well; for a promise is but a chain that may gall more than it binds; and the strongest of all ties is the unacknowledged one that the heart forges for itself. But,

unfortunately, they whose constancy would shine out most brightly unimpaired by time or absence, are the very ones who suffer most severely from the alternating hopes and fears which must accompany an unacknowledged love, and which perplex the reason, and make the word 'free' but a term of mockery.

Lionel Weymouth left England with a noble appreciation of Geraldine Harmer's worth, and a heart truly and deeply devoted to her. Every purpose and aspiration of his nature led up to one hope—the hope of her affection, and perpetual companionship through the meridian and decline of life: for Youth, he foresaw, must be passed in the struggle to win her; but he left with his love unspoken! Perhaps his feelings might have betrayed him from his resolution had not their last interview been broken by one of those commonplace accidents which so often jar on the soul's truer world of thought and emotion. The gushing words flew back to the heart unuttered; and they parted in the presence of others, much as ordinary acquaintances might have done.

There is, generally speaking, so much in a man's nature that is incomprehensible to a woman, that it is always a daring task for her to weigh his actions, or to attempt the divination of his feelings. His love is seldom her love; his faith is not her faith; his life is not her life—only in moments of existence which shine out briefly and brightly in the dark expanse of memory, like stars on the purple firmament, does it seem that love and sympathy can raise the curtain and let one soul perceive the other. For if woman knows not man, neither can he, except in rarest instances,

regulate the spring of her faults, or discover the fountain of her virtues.

Thus it is not for me to tell how passed the years with Lionel Weymouth. Active was his life, and prosperous in no ordinary degree, if the esteem and respect of his fellow-men could make it so, and the gold which seemed by some strange alchemy to multiply itself at his bidding. He corresponded with Geraldine Harmer on terms of affectionate friendship ; but he spoke not of love and marriage at first, because to the integrity of his purpose it still belonged to hold her ' free.' But time passed on, and a few strokes of his pen secured ease and independence to his grateful and affectionate sisters. They married too, soon afterwards, in the sphere which was theirs by birth and education. And still he corresponded with Geraldine Harmer, though without any change in the tone of his letters ; only that the presents which often accompanied them grew more and more costly. Instead of graceful trinkets, precious more as souvenirs of his regard than for their intrinsic value, came shawls of Cashmere, meet for royalty itself — the costliest tissues from the looms of Decca, and jewels of great value — a monument they were, but we ask, as the poet did at the tomb of a wife, was it ' love or pride ?' The tenderness of deep regard shone forth in every page he wrote ; yet still he did not ask her to be his. Why ? Ah ! that is precisely the question a woman cannot answer.

Time passed very differently with Geraldine Harmer. Hers was a life of great retirement ; her father's age and increasing infirmity inducing with

each year greater seclusion, while her own inclinations henceforth eschewed, not less decidedly, the vanities and frivolities of the gay world. With the awakening of the heart comes also the awakening to the hollowness of what the world calls pleasure; and she, like a thousand others, content with the secret worship of a beautiful idea, relinquished every likely opportunity of substituting for it some absolute reality. She was almost happy — cheerful certainly; and four years passed away with the seeming swiftness for ever attendant on a calm and uniform course. It is time in which action, and change, and suffering crowd, that in the retrospect appears so long. Geraldine was seven-and-twenty when her father died. It was a great grief to her; but one of those sorrows which a merciful Providence heals by the touch of time.

A portion of Mr. Harmer's income died with him, but Geraldine found herself mistress of about four hundred a year. This was an income quite sufficient to supply her moderate wants, and gratify her simple tastes. She remained in the same pretty cottage they had so long inhabited, and by dint of frequently, almost constantly having a female friend for a visitor, contrived the nearest approach to an independent style of living which it is possible for a young single woman to accomplish; at least without touching the confines of those conventional proprieties, which sometimes bristle very vexatiously in the way of the most pure-intentioned. And still came the letters from India; but less through them than by more indirect channels did she learn that Lionel Weymouth was acquiring a princely fortune, to which her moderate independence would be an unfelt addition.

And still time passed, and Geraldine was thirty — that age at which the fatherless, brotherless, single woman need pause and ask her own nature if it have enough of the oak in itself still, still to stand alone. Probably she will look back with rejoicing at having escaped some particular union, or more than one ; and certainly, if she have mind and heart, her ideal of happiness will be far higher and nobler than it was ten years before. If — but it is with Geraldine we have to do ; and she, like so many others, bore the talisman in her heart which shaped out her life as if by the iron hand of Destiny.

CHAPTER II.

'It hurts not him
That he is loved of me.'

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

'I FEAR, Watson, we shall have stormy weather,' said Geraldine, addressing an old fisherman whom she had known ever since her first residence on the coast. Watson was an excellent specimen of the British tar — one of the fortunate class who, having escaped the most fearful vicissitudes of active service, disdain the refuge of Greenwich, and rejoicing in the proper complement of limbs and features, ekes out an honest and peaceful, and at the same time semi-marine existence, as waterman and fisherman.

'Aye, aye, miss,' said Watson, throwing down the cordage he was joining, and touching his hat to the

lady, and the next minute he had sprung from his boat which lay idle on the beach, and was sauntering with a sailor's swagger beside her. This was no unusual occurrence; for Watson, as I have said, was an old acquaintance. If he advised a sail, and said the weather was settled, Geraldine and her friends were always willing to trust themselves to his skill and care; these pleasure-trips being usually enlivened by a story from the old 'man-of-war's-man.' It is true that some of these became thrice-told tales; but the exactness with which the 'yarns' were repeated only impressed his hearers with a conviction of Watson's veracity. He was an honest fellow in the main—a little addicted, it might be, to driving hard bargains in the fishing-season, when he had got a successful 'haul' of fish, and was able to fix the market price; on which occasions, however, his full heart must vent itself, and he usually made some excuse to call at the cottage and relate his good fortune. Sometimes he met with a rebuke instead of a congratulation, which he listened to with the greatest respect, satisfying his conscience with the reflection that his avocations bordered on a sort of political economy quite beyond a young lady's reasoning. Yet he did not think the world contained so perfect a creature as his patroness; and imbued as he was with the deepest reverence for her, an absolute affection, almost unconsciously to himself, had taken still deeper root in his heart. All these feelings had expressed themselves in the only compliment he knew how to pay. On the recent repairing and fresh painting of his darling boat, he had called it the 'Geraldine,' its former laurels

having been won under the repellant title of 'The Gorgon.' Sailors must be exceedingly fond of the hideously picturesque ; and it *was* a sacrifice to carve away the unsightly figure-head into a shapeless mass, which probably more resembled a cornucopia than anything else. As for attempting to substitute a likeness of Geraldine herself, he would have thought it presumption had a ghost from the old carvers arisen to attempt it.

'Are there many boats out ?' continued Geraldine, drawing her shawl tightly round her ; for the freshening breeze had almost plucked it from her shoulders.

'All our craft will be in before sun-down,' replied Watson, 'if I know the men. I told them this morning a squall was coming on, and you see there's half-a-dozen owners who took my advice, and their craft are side by side my "Geraldine." But I tell you what, miss — there's a brig in the offing that had better hold out to sea. This is nasty weather to come in without a pilot ; and they hav'nt one on board, I know, by the roads she is in now.'

Alas ! the seaman's fears were but too well founded. As night drew on, so increased the hurricane ; and by midnight the tempest was raging. The unfortunate brig fired guns of distress ; but no boat could have lived through the surf that broke round the coast, like some guard of the furies to forbid a rescue. Geraldine Harmer slept not ; but though, often and often, sympathy with the mariners' perils had kept her wakeful, never before had she paced her own sheltered chamber with so anxious a heart. The brig which had been shown her in the offing, and whose

guns of distress she had heard, haunted her with its presence ; and the dangers of its crew pressed on her imagination with a force and a mystery alike new to her. It seemed as if her soul maintained some vague yet spiritual union with them, and she already felt that she knew the disasters which others could only fear.

When the first leaden grey of morning dawned Geraldine unbarred her window, and looked out on the ocean in the distance. The rage of the tempest had abated, but dark driving clouds still obscured the sky, and the sea with a harsh roar still heaved in monstrous billows, and lashed the shore with its yellow foam. She could not distinguish what was doing on the beach, but crowds of people here and there attested some purpose of humanity or object of curiosity. Geraldine roused a servant, and in a few minutes she and her attendant hurried forth ; but as they approached the beach some of the sailors intercepted them, anxious to save women from the mournful scene to which they had gathered. In few words the tale was told. The brig had gone to pieces on the rocks, and the tide had already washed several dead bodies on shore. Shocked as Geraldine was, and her nerves shaken till she found relief in a flood of tears, the scene even to its minute details appeared but the realization of a dream, and it did not seem within the power of her will to leave the spot. She did not seek the sad spectacles which presented themselves, but she could not shun them — ‘Where is Watson?’ she asked, not seeing him among the many familiar faces that crowded round her.

‘He has gone off, ma’am,’ replied a bystander, ‘with half-a-dozen other boats, in the hopes of still saving some lives from the wreck.’

And another, who had been watching through a glass the spot where a bare mast, sustaining a signal flag, but rocking at the will of the winds, proclaimed the scene of the disaster, exclaimed joyfully — ‘They are turning back! they are coming in!’

And so it was. Now riding on the crest of a wave, now lost to sight in a watery ravine, the boats sped homeward, battling with dangers and difficulties, but surmounting them all. Presently they could be plainly seen by every anxious watcher, and very soon each separate craft could be distinguished. How the spring of kindly thought and generous deed seemed touched in every heart, as all showed themselves eager to proffer assistance! The first boat that touched the beach contained six or eight sailors, not all Englishmen, who had been rescued from impending death, and from whom it was ascertained that the lost brig was a merchant ship from Mexico and the Havanna; that the captain was among the lost, and that the few passengers who were on board had met the same fate, even in the desperate attempt which had been made to rescue them together in the long boat. With one exception however, a child, a girl of ten or eleven years old, who was reported to be saved.

It was the ‘Geraldine’ which brought off this child; Watson had found her in a nearly insensible state, lashed to a piece of the wreck beside the dead body of a negro woman, said to have been her nurse and only protector during the voyage. The woman had died

from some injury on the head — some blow received, no doubt, from the falling spars of the ill-fated vessel ; but faithful to the death, her swarthy arm still encircled the scarcely animate form of her charge.

Geraldine Harmer felt drawn irresistibly to the spot where Watson was approaching the shingle. Every one made way for her, and, saving the men who waded through the surf to assist the landing, she was the first to greet the brave old man. At the bottom of the boat, and decently covered with a piece of canvas, which imperfectly revealed the rigid outlines of death, lay the body of the negress ; while in the prow, on a couch made of the same rough fabric, the child was extended. Exhausted as she was by suffering, her loveliness was too remarkable to escape notice even at a moment like this. Features that seemed chiselled to the outline of perfect beauty were hers, and a complexion not fair, it is true, but of unsullied clearness, through which the flush of feeling was wont to be the tell-tale of every passing thought. But now the cheek was pallid, and the eyelids drooped, as if to lay their long dark lashes against its whiteness. Her hair almost black, but of a shade richer and brighter, was parted and plaited with care, the ends being tied by what was yesterday perhaps a gay colored ribbon, now stained and faded by the sea-water. As Watson lifted her in his arms, the lithe and graceful figure to which the saturated garments clung, and the tiny feet and delicate ankle, completed the picture.

Geraldine's kind and generous heart yearned towards the desolate girl, and though many of the bystanders offered succor and protection, they drew back

almost as if relinquishing a claim, when she said, 'Carry her home to the cottage to me. I will take charge of her till she is claimed by her friends.'

And now a new life opened to Geraldine Harmer. She did not know before how sweet a thing it was to have one human being dependent on her for love and help ; and before a week had passed she dreaded the time which should bring tidings of the child's parentage, or the assertion of claims greater than her own. Florentia was her name, and, as the child persisted and believed, the only one she had ; and Spanish was the only language that she spoke. Not, however, the pure Castilian, which a student might have comprehended, or to which Geraldine's knowledge of Italian would have helped her, but a strange jargon which no one could be found thoroughly to understand. And it was remarkable that, as she acquired English, which she did with wonderful facility, the child seemed to lose the recollection of her native tongue ! Perhaps she was even younger than she seemed, for tropical growth defies European calculation ; and fondly as in many respects there was evidence she had been tended, her mind was utterly uncultivated. She could not read, and books even seemed a novelty to her ; though she would turn them about, and look for embellishments of art in their pages ; showing, too, in her choice, a quick eye and right taste in appreciating a graceful outline, or beautiful landscape. From the child's own account, so far as she could make herself understood, her home had been in a sultry climate, where she had lived with a dark lady whom she called her mother, surrounded with pomp and state and luxuries. That a short time

before she left this home her mother received a letter — a letter brought, she knew, from a ship ; that it contained bad news, she was sure ; that her mother broke into a passion of rage and grief on reading it ; that she threw herself on the floor, and tore her hair in her agony. That then she fell ill, but before she died, she had bound Netta, the negress, by some fearful oath, to do her bidding ; and that she had given her a jewel-hilted dagger, for some purpose of vengeance, which dagger, by the way, had been found on the body when preparing it for interment. Of her father, Florentia knew nothing, except that her mother wore a miniature of him till the bad letter came, and that then she had broken it into fragments and trampled it under her feet.

What a story ! One in which just enough of fact was told to awaken the curiosity it could not satisfy. It seemed to point at love and guilt — the betrayer and the betrayed ; that love, if love it should be called, which, lighted by the flame of jealousy, may change to hate — vengeance — purposed crime — every stormy passion of the soul, every thing which rends and shatters it — except remorse. There could be little doubt that Florentia was a quadroon, one of that class where the point of mixed descent is generally as remarkable for its beauty, as for the unhappy circumstances of social position which descend as a legacy to a spurious race.

Of Religion the child had none ; her only idea connected with it being that of propitiating the Virgin, whose image, in the form of a chased gold ornament, she had constantly worn.

Probably, had the captain of the brig been saved, he might have been able to give some account of his passengers; as it was, conjecture spent itself in vain surmises. The advertisements inserted in England, and sent out to Mexico, remained unanswered, and all which could be ascertained — and that was a sort of negative information — was that no such passengers as the negress and the child had been registered to the owners of the ship. Most probably some golden persuasions had overruled that customary formality.

Many a heart has a wider capacity for loving than itself is at all aware of; but what a pity that affection — the only sweetener of existence — should waste and wither for want of objects on which to rest! Most truly has one of our deepest thinkers — aye, and sternest moralists too, for he lashes his fellow-men for their follies and weaknesses almost as severely as for their vices, and eschews all ‘rose-water’ measures as inefficacious — most truly even he says that the wealth of a man consists in the number of things that he loves and blesses, and is loved and blessed by; and to believe this is surely the most beautiful faith in the world, even as to go on increasing such riches, bestowing and blessing as we receive and are blessed, is the holiest and happiest life we can lead. Wherever the seed of affection is sown, some weed of selfishness is uprooted to make way for it.

Months passed away; and now Florentia spoke English fluently. If a slightly foreign accent still hovered on her tongue, or some strange but yet expressive word found its place in a sentence, such peculiarity but gave another charm to a voice that was

the most musical in the world. As graceful as she was beautiful, her very presence was a perpetual poetry in the house. Who could look at this womanish child and childish woman, and not find excuse for her faults, if by dint of narrow searching you could discover them? Certainly not Geraldine Harmer; for the luscious intoxicating incense of affection rose up round her, and obscured her judgment! It is a trite remark, that we love better those we serve than them who benefit us; but there was an exception to the rule here, for the child attached herself to her protectress, and returned her affection with all the quickness and passion of her southern nature. Oh, that *personal* love! how very, very sweet it is! The love of a child or of a dog who attaches itself, not because we are rich, or clever, or handsome, or even good, but for some individuality about us—that something which we call—oneself. If the child might hang about Geraldine's neck, fall asleep with her head on her knee, cling to her hand, or, failing this, hold by a morsel of her dress, she was happy; and she showed that she was happy, by her sunny looks and the satisfied smile that played round her lips. She had the courage too of a little lioness, when occasion called it forth. Witness the following incident:—

Geraldine had determined to be herself the instructress of her youthful *protégée*, and fully aware that a mind possessing almost the quickness of maturity, and yet presenting the very blank of early childhood, could be subjected to no common discipline, imposed but few set rules or book lessons on her pupil. But how she talked! how *they* talked, for the child ques-

tioned and gave free expression to her thoughts ; and Geraldine listened with no little interest to the strange fresh ideas which found utterance. One day they were taking a country walk together ; walking and talking ; now of the bee or of the butterfly as it floated near or dived into the cup of a wild flower ; now of the sparkling stream they had just crossed, how it came from the hills and was journeying to the sea ; and now of the blue sky overhead, and the stars that came out when the sun went down. Suddenly they heard a howling on the other side of the hedge ; and a cat made furious by the driving of some mischievous boys sprang through, and darting at Geraldine caused her to scream with momentary and involuntary terror. In an instant the child threw herself on the animal, and though its talons literally ploughed into her hands and her cheek, and though she fell to the ground in the struggle, she relinquished not her hold on its throat. The rage which flashed like an electric light from her eyes, and flushed in her cheek, so altered her countenance for the moment, that she would hardly have been recognised by those who knew her best ; but it gave way to a quiver of scorn round her lips as she knew that the creature was strangling in the grasp of her little hands, which neither Geraldine's attempts nor entreaties could relax. They were alone—for the urchins, the original cause of their terror, had made off in another direction ; and not till the unfortunate cat had ceased to struggle and was dead in her hands, did the child fling it from her and kick it for carrion out of her path.

There was something in this scene which terrified

Geraldine, if in a different manner, yet in a much greater degree, than the furious cat had done. It was the first gleam she had had of the stormy passions that slumbered in that young heart; and she felt what giants to work good or evil were crouching there. Florentia herself could not understand that she had done the least wrong in giving way to her anger; and how could Geraldine chide very severely, when that anger had been aroused in her defence?

‘What shall I call you?’ had been one of the child’s earliest questions to her protectress, and Geraldine pausing a minute had said, ‘Call me sister.’ So sister, sister, was the sweet word that rung daily, hourly, in her ears, with a harmony of which she never wearied, suggesting as it ever did some thought of affection. Geraldine asked not herself how it was that she cared so much less than before for her acquaintances; and yet it was so; the companionship of the loving and fresh-hearted child seemed all in all to her. This love was her one reality in life. Let us pause to ask if it clashed with that which was her soul’s sustaining Idea!

Not for one instant. Distinct as double stars, they lent each other a light — blended their rays it might be, but never disturbed the harmony of her being. She wrote to Lionel Weymouth a full account of the shipwreck; mentioned the adoption of the little unknown child; described her extraordinary beauty; sketched her strange impulsive character; gave even the anecdote of the slaughtered cat, which latter incident won from him a hearty approval, and caused him always to mention her as the little heroine. He applauded Ger-

aldine's adoption of her, and rejoiced that she had so interesting a companion; and now, when presents came 'from India,' the *protégée* was sure to be remembered. But the gift, however gorgeous or costly, was always a childish toy. Lionel had been told she was a little girl of nine or ten, or eleven years old, and forgot the change that four or five years must work in these early spring-days of life. How swiftly they passed by, seeming like a dream to look back on!—yet they opened to perfect loveliness the budding promise of the child, while they stealthily robbed Geraldine of her early bloom. Still she looked younger than she really was; as they always do—when compared with commoner clay—who have souls to light up the countenance, and make known the one imperishable beauty of expression.

CHAPTER III.

‘Be tended by
My blessing! should my shadow cross thy thoughts
Too sadly for their peace, so put it back
For calmer hours in memory’s darkest hold.
If unforgotten! should it cross thy dreams,
So might it come like one that looks content,
With quiet eyes unfaithful to the truth.’

TENNYSON.

WAS it summer or autumn? Even the calendar would scarcely have helped you to decide? It was the time when English scenery wears a gorgeous, and yet sober hue; when, in the still atmosphere, the dark-robed trees stand motionless, as if too proud to sway

in the breeze, as they might when decked in palest green, or laughing behind a mask of blossoms; and when the garden-flowers are no longer those richly-scented children of the soil, that came like heralds — the heralds of the present statelier race.

As we have hinted, Time had done much in his own quiet way during the last few years, and among other things a certain avenue of beeches, mere saplings when Geraldine first came to her cottage, had grown to be the admiration of every visitor. Their boughs just met overhead, in some cases kissing and parting at the bidding of the faintest breeze, at others interlacing their fibres and refusing a divorce. Beneath these trees ran a hard and polished gravel path, though at their very roots was spread that soft and mossy, dark green turf, which tells of care and cultivation.

It was the evening of a warm bright day; the sun had already sunk far below the horizon, and the golden harvest-moon decked the garden landscape in that olden beauty, of which we never weary, and to which, familiar as it is, we still find paid the meed and word of admiration. Along the gravel path, beneath the sheltering trees, a young girl danced, enticing after her a favorite greyhound, whose airy movements seemed typical of her own — danced from the mere exuberance of happiness and mirth — danced to the only music of her own rich singing. Tuneful as that of a bird it was, and almost as wild; for though Florentia's delicate ear saved her from the possibility of a discord, she was wilful in her ways, and finding she could play — to please herself — on any instrument which came before her, and sing after the same fashion to the same

easily contented auditor, she positively resisted all study when she reached the point that would chain her to application. Yet her snatches of song, and perfect modulation, made up a charming music nevertheless.

And so she danced, her full white dress floating in the soft breeze, now showing, now hiding her lithe and graceful figure. A scarlet cashmere scarf, with richly embroidered ends, had fallen from one shoulder, but passing by her waist, was gathered lightly in her hand. The scarf was Geraldine's, but it was one of Florentia's wilful ways to appropriate for the moment anything of her 'sister's' to which she took a fancy.

Geraldine Harmer might also have been seen in the beech-tree avenue, but walking slowly, and some lookers-on might have thought most calmly; for the shadows were too heavy to show the fitful gleam of her eye, or the quiver of her lip, whenever the sound of wheels broke on her ear, or the listening sense was strained to fantasy, and mocked her with its cheat. In her hand she grasped a letter, she knew not why, for every syllable of its brief contents seemed repeated before her wherever she gazed, — on the sombre trees, or the calm cold sky. At last, at last Lionel Weymouth had returned — even now was speeding to greet her, and had announced his coming in words more full of tender meaning than any he had ever addressed to her before. She felt that his heart had been through the long years of absence as true as her own; and her frame trembled and reeled under the excess of her happiness.

It was before the days of universal railroads, and trusting to the uncertainties and delays of posting, there

is no wonder that Lionel Weymouth was an hour or two later than he had expected to be. But why should his coming at all bring such joy to Florentia ? Simply because she understood, though vaguely, that Geraldine's dearest friend, of whose goodness and cleverness she had so often talked — Geraldine would scarcely have believed how often — was coming at last ; and being herself always quite happy — happy to the very filling of her heart, this new delight brimmed over the cup to that free burst of joyancy.

Hark ! now surely that is the sound of wheels ! Yes, yes — nearer : ah, there is the clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the piece of shingly road. A carriage turns the corner, and now the postilions, directed by some villager, sweep up to the gate. The servants are ready, but a gentleman has sprung out before the steps could be lowered. Florentia no longer sings, and for a minute is motionless. And Geraldine Harmer — she who at this moment for the first time fully realizes the depth and truth, and intensity of a love which has been for ten years a portion of her being, is she also awed to silent stillness ? Almost — and yet she glides as if impelled by some magnetic force into the deepest shadow of the trees, her dress of darkest velvet does not betray her, and she leans against a friendly trunk to save herself from falling. The hour is come, and yet her heart cries out, ' Not yet — not yet ; it is too much ! '

But the stranger sees, by the full moonlight, the graceful figure, standing like a white-robed statue in the beech-tree avenue ; recognises, too, the scarf, his gift, and bounding thither, clasps Florentia in his arms

before she is aware, kisses her cheek with a trembling lip, and murmurs the one word 'Geraldine !' before a laughing voice has time to say, '*I am not Geraldine !*'

He starts — discovers his mistake at a glance — makes a confused apology, and seeing Geraldine at last, wreathes his arm round her ; but he is annoyed at his own blundering precipitation, and neither kiss nor embrace is so warm as those which were in truth the free outbreak of his feelings !

'Is she not beautiful ?' exclaimed Geraldine, an hour or two afterwards, when a late dinner or early supper being concluded, Florentia had left the room for a few minutes. 'Is she not as beautiful as I told you she was ?'

'Beautiful !' replied Lionel Weymouth, 'she is the loveliest creature I ever beheld !'

Yet, while he spoke, he held Geraldine's hand in his, and had already found fit opportunity of breathing in her ear the hopes and aspirations of his life. It was late that night ere he left for the hotel where he had engaged accommodation.

And now, Geraldine Harmer, indulge for the brief interval you may the ecstasy of pure, unclouded happiness — the dream of perfect love. Thou bearest the signet of thine own devotion, in the humility which wonders how *thou* canst be so well beloved, commingled with that unshaken faith which cannot doubt *his* word. Dream on, poor woman heart, of earth's choice happiness, and life's sole reality — dream on ; the hours are brief, and years must fling their shadows,

ere that dream, but in serener shape, shall descend to thee from heaven again !

Three weeks have passed : the scene is in London now. Geraldine Harmer has accepted the invitation of an old friend, and with Florentia has journeyed thither. Some indefinable, yet right feeling, pointed out this step. Lionel Weymouth desires her daily society ; yet they are not to the world's eye betrothed. He does not urge the declaration of their engagement, and she instinctively shrinks from it. Kind, affectionate he is, and yet — and yet she is restless and unsatisfied ! But they are very gay — as gay, at least, as London's dullest season will permit ; and theatres are visited, and a few parties are gathered together to do honor to Lionel Weymouth.

It might be called Florentia's first introduction into society ; but she had none of that girlish, bashful awkwardness, which much oftener arises from anxious vanity and excessive self-consciousness than from the opposite cause. She was far too natural and impulsive a being for anything of the sort ; she had sprung, it is true, as if at one bound, from the child to the woman ; but the simple, yet warm sincerity and *naïve* vivacity of her manners had a charm about them as captivating as it was indescribable. And her beauty — of that there could not be two opinions. Strangers raved of it, and on seeing her again, only grew more and more extravagant in their expressions of admiration. Lovers were already entering the lists, and 'looking daggers' at one another ; but awed by some mysterious halo that seemed to encircle their idol, they had not dared to avow their homage.

As if to make amends for his one familiarity, however unintended, Lionel Weymouth treated Florentia with a marked respect, that bordered on deference, and had something singular in its character, when the difference of age between them was remembered. At first, it could not have been quite easy for him to maintain, since she treated him as an old and familiar friend; but by quick degrees her manner changed, and while to three fourths of her acquaintance she was still the childish girl, to him she was ever the dignified woman. His respect was even of a distant kind; for he always left to others to surround her with those *petits soins* and nameless attentions, so many were eager and ready to pay. Yet once, when a fop whom she laughed at and despised, was forcing some knightly service upon her somewhat against her will — folding and arranging a shawl for her shoulders, I think — Lionel Weymouth was quick to the rescue. But why did his cheek flush, and his hands tremble? and why, when she thanked him with a look, and passed her arm uninvited through his, did the flush change to paleness, and the common-place words he strove to utter die upon his tongue?

Geraldine saw the look, the flush, the sudden pallor; but she only drew her opera-hood a little more over her face, and took the arm of the discarded stripling.

It was the next day: Geraldine Harmer, who had not hitherto in her whole life consented to a subterfuge, for once planned and manœuvred. She contrived that Florentia and her hostess should be away for some hours, and this during the time that Lionel Weymouth was sure to call. He was shown into the drawing-

room, and awaited her coming, but only for a few minutes. She entered, and a friendly greeting ensued ; but as Geraldine passed the nearest window, she drew down the blind. It was a cloudy day, and yet the light seemed gairish, as it always does to the mentally oppressed — blinding to her eyes and torturing to her brain. Lionel Weymouth was seated in an easy chair, and presently Geraldine found herself leaning over the back of it. She felt that she must speak without being seen ; she knew that she could not control her countenance.

‘ Lionel,’ she exclaimed, in a low, yet calm tone, ‘ you are not happy !’

‘ Not happy ! oh yes ; why not ?’

‘ Be frank,’ she returned : ‘ do not deceive yourself or me. I repeat, you are not — we are not — happy !’

‘ Geraldine !’ It was the only word to which it seemed he could give utterance — there was a forced intention to take her hand ; but a stronger and truer impulse restrained him.

‘ And yet,’ she continued, ‘ the first wish of my heart, — the purpose of my life — is to make you happy.’

‘ Best Geraldine !’ But now he stooped his head, and buried his face in his hands.

‘ Even ’ — and she touched his arm as she spoke — ‘ even if your happiness must take a different shape from that foolish dream of early life. Moreover I blame you not — I see your sufferings, and from my soul I pity them.’

‘ Oh, that you would despise and rebuke me instead — your scorn, so well deserved, would be more endurable than such compassion.’

‘You are ungenerous now. Would you rob me of my own self-respect? While I honor and esteem you, I shall not be ashamed of’ — and her voice perceptibly trembled — ‘of the love I have borne you.’

‘And I! Oh, Geraldine, if you but knew how, for long years I have worshipped your image — how every aim of existence has circled round to one dear hope — how, even now; how very dear you are to me ——’

‘And yet,’ interrupted Geraldine, ‘you love Florentia!’

There was a pause; one of those pauses in which the tongue is chained because emotions crowd and crush together, paralyzing every power except the keen experience of the heart’s unutterable agony. What *he* felt was but vaguely shadowed forth; less clearly told by word or gesture than by the rigid lines of suffering to which his visage moulded. With Geraldine the last ray of hope, which quite unconsciously to herself had lingered in her heart and redeemed it from utter darkness, expired, and — groping for a moment in the gloom — her reason took time to recover its balance. But bravely it wrestled, and beautifully her soul triumphed.

‘Youth has departed,’ continued Geraldine, at length, ‘and I should have known that the few graces ——’

‘No — no,’ interrupted Lionel, seizing her hand, and pressing it between his own; ‘I will not listen to such words. Take me — for I am yours — take me, and save me from myself! Take me, directly — to-morrow; forgive me this wandering of the will, and I will learn to look upon it as a madness! Take me, Geraldine!’

‘To scorn myself — and blight the happiness of the two beings I love best in the world? Never! You do not know me, Lionel Weymouth.’

‘Oh, do not draw your hand away, and speak so sternly. Even now, in my humiliation and deep misery, it is *your* sympathy I want. And yet, Geraldine, it is well for you to be cold.’

‘Cold!’ It was but the one word she could utter, and as it came forth it seemed to freeze her lips, and keep them parted — cold! when at that moment she would have flung herself at his feet to be trampled in the mire, if *that* could have given him peace; cold! when the large silent tears of agony were falling from her eyes, unregarded by him, though they splashed like rain-drops on his shoulder; cold! when, for one word or look of genuine love from the idol of her worship, she would have thought life itself but a fit sacrifice! Yet gentle, though heroic, as was her nature — the word had stung her, and spurred from its lair that fiery steed, a woman’s pride.

‘Take me,’ repeated Lionel, ‘and forgive this madness.’

‘It was the past which was madness,’ said Geraldine, firmly; and her tears seemed now absorbed by the long lashes — at least, they fell no longer. ‘You will marry Florentia!’

‘Yes,’ she continued, after a brief silence — for he was speechless, and had buried his face in his handkerchief — ‘and by-and-bye we shall smile at the old maid’s “love passage,” and wonder how she could have been so foolish.’

‘Florentia may avenge your wrongs, Geraldine, and refuse to love me.’

There was something in these words which again unnerved her. Refuse to love him — that seemed impossible ! But she spoke calmly, and said, ‘I have no wrongs to be avenged ; dismiss such a thought from your mind. And — and — Florentia admires you, that I know. And think you that securing her happiness will not bring peace to me ? Ah ! you cannot tell how dear she is to me — dear as any sister could have been, dear almost as I could fancy a child might be.’

She spoke the truth, and yet her words, as truth may often do, conveyed a false impression. Lionel Weymouth believed at that moment that Florentia was dearer to her than he had ever been ; and that several wishes and feelings worked together to prompt her present conduct. Her resolution might, in some measure, have been strengthened by her love for the object of his passion, yet not in the manner or to the degree that he imagined. Geraldine Harmer was one who acted from her own right impulses, yoked with, rather than chained by, high principles ; yet she did not analyze her motives narrowly enough to find how noble they were. And her generous nature unconsciously masked its generosity — partly from that interwoven pride, without which no character has dignity, and partly from the sensitive delicacy which shrinks from making another feel the object of a sacrifice or the recipient of a favor.

Ah, how seldom the best and wisest of us can judge truly of another ! Faults and weaknesses rise like straws to the surface ; and great virtues, thrown up by

the storms of life — like pearls from the deep — become apparent ; but the intermediate world, which is that of habitual emotion and daily existence, which makes the realities of life, and which moulds the individuality of character, is seldom fathomed. No wonder Lionel Weymouth failed to see the ruin he had worked ; the beautiful palace which Hope had built and Faith made strong, laid prostrate in the dust ; and Desolation growing to a giant, and brooding over the fragments !

It was a rapid wooing, that of Florentia Lawson — (Geraldine had bestowed on her *protégée* her own mother's name.) A few weeks and the wedding-day was named, and no one paused, or had paused to consider if it were a gulf or a haven before the pair. So great the difference of years between them, that in her happy days Geraldine had shrunk from making Florentia her confidante, and the artless girl had never suspected that the most dear friend of whom she had heard so much could be looked on in any other light. Yes, it was Geraldine's praise of him she loved that had prepared her to admire him ; and when Lionel came, she saw a man in the prime and pride of life, with a mind well stored and enriched by travel and observation ; though, perhaps, she did not herself know how much the impression he made on her was deepened by his being the first of his sex who treated her otherwise than as a child.

Geraldine was the first to hint to Florentia that Lionel loved her. Partly because her own soul once nerved to meet the destiny which was before her, she felt there must be no pause or hesitation in its course ;

and partly because, generous to the last, she was willing to prepare *his* way before him. Startled as the young girl was at first, surprise soon gave way to an intoxication of delight; it was all true, and in a few, very few days they were betrothed. Now came a new trial for Geraldine: with the innocent frankness of a child, Florentia would sit at her feet, and throwing back the rich clustering curls from her face as she looked up, would talk of her happiness, and pour out her praises of *him*. The admiration she had first experienced still held its place in her heart; and side by side with it now stood pride — pride at being the object of his choice. Nor was she insensible to the influence and charm of his wealth; though if visions of future magnificence floated before her, it is only just to own, there was not one in which her dear 'sister' had not place — was not to be endowed with some costly gift, or pleased with some expensive enjoyment. But if she was proud of being chosen, was not he proud of being accepted? Yes. She was so young — so beautiful; and when her lip answered to his kiss, he felt assured he was beloved!

Pride — admiration — passion — the common elements wherewith poor self-deluders think to build up wedded happiness! As much material as can be expected when there is a score of years' disparity between the parties; unless, indeed, the mating be at that later period of life when character on both sides is formed and developed, and the difference of a score of years or a score of weeks would be equally unimportant. But Love there was not — there could not be; Love which is Sympathy, and of which the fond caress or

endearing word is but an outward and earthly type. If we speak to be understood — yea, if we only think, for another's thoughts to flow in unison with ours, not wearying with tame monotony, but even as bright rivers mingle ere they reach the ocean, bringing each to each its separate wealth and separate hue — enriching, strengthening, beautifying! this there was not.

What Geraldine Harmer endured is written only in that book, where surely beyond the skies a record is kept of Woman's trials and sacrifices. Hours of despair, in which madness with all its terrors hovered near, and death, which seemed more distant, looked like a benignant angel, yet one forbid to aid her. She made no confidante — she was too proud to do so; and indulged not in demonstrations. Still it was impossible such struggles could endure without making sign of their work; but the cluster of acquaintances we call 'the world' — who never, I believe, by any chance guess rightly the riddles of life — attributed her looking ill to the fatigue and excitement she was undergoing in preparing for the wedding. Everybody congratulated her on the 'brilliant match' her *protégée* was making, much as they would a dowager, on the like bestowal of a portionless daughter. And without any positive intentions of malice or scandal, they added half a dozen years at least to her age; as well they might, for the lingering traces of youth had departed suddenly and for ever, and her long, fine hair, which only a few weeks since was dark, and rich, and abundant, now showed lines of white that seemed to thicken day by day. Her beautiful hair! of which she had been conscious and proud — even a little vain — this

too must be laid upon the altar of her vanished — wasted Youth! Strange that those whitening tresses had a spell which flung a shadow in his path, and saddened Lionel Weymouth's spirit even on his Wedding Day!

CHAPTER IV.

'If I be sure I am not dreaming now,
I should not doubt to say it was a dream.'

SHELLEY.

YEARS have passed away; seven years at least. It is a bright spring day — when spring has caught a flower or two from summer that is so close at hand. Birds trill their glad notes from the neighboring boughs, now in gay chorus, now taking up the single strain as if in loving rivalry. The buzz of busy insects fills the air, and every sound and sight of nature is typical of joy and youth, showing once more the old and yet the new-born graces of the Hebe-Mother earth!

Soon after his marriage, Lionel Weymouth had purchased a beautiful residence, with highly-cultivated pleasure-grounds, within an easy drive of the metropolis. And here we still find him. But those seven years have brought their chances and changes, and life wears to him now a very different aspect. He is seated near an open window, and near him is a lady, a much-loved visitor, arrived within these few hours, after an absence of many months on the continent. The reader should recognise her at once, for Geraldine Harmer is very little altered; or, if altered at all, one

might say improved in appearance. She did not look any older than on the 'wedding day' we parted from her; and though suffering now from painful anxiety, her countenance had lost the habitual shade of sadness it then wore. It would seem that at one bound she had sprung from almost youth to that most uncertain of all ages called 'certain;' but that since then, Time had passed her by, without claiming his tribute. He had even stayed the bleaching of the hair, which showed in massive glossy coils beneath the prettiest of morning caps (a Parisian purchase), which Geraldine wore; the few lines of silver among the braids which shaded her cheek being by no means unbecoming—they never are, when forty years are fairly passed. Nature adapts her pictures better than the inventors of patent wigs and mysterious hair dyes, and the whitening locks harmonize with the fading cheek, with which youthful tresses only contrast. Then Geraldine had the good taste to eschew girlish costume, and dress like what she was—the woman of forty-one or two. Having mentioned the pretty cap therefore, I may add that her dress was of a rich, dark silk—made, however, very fashionably, and which set off her figure, unimpaired in its roundness and symmetry, to the greatest advantage.

I really fear that in my earlier chapters I neglected to describe Geraldine's person; and now it is so late in the day, I must needs be brief. Of the middle height, with fine eyes, a pretty mouth, and good teeth, many people thought her still a very 'charming woman;' and every one who had made her acquaintance lately, believed she must been very handsome a

few years ago. Perhaps this was not altogether true : her beauty consisted very much in the beauty of expression ; and as this depends on character, and as every development of character with her had been a beautiful one, it is very possible that she was better-looking *for* a woman of forty than she had been *as the girl* of twenty. She might have married within the last seven years, as the saying is, 'over and over again ;' and there is no numbering how many opportunities she had had of choosing during her tour on the continent (made with friends who were known at every court in Europe) among German barons and Italian counts ; but not even a French peer, who was neither old nor disagreeable, could make her appreciate the privilege of embroidering a coronet on her handkerchief.

Clinging lovingly by her side was her godchild and namesake, Lionel's eldest daughter, a beautiful girl of six years old. She took not after her mother, for she was grave and thoughtful beyond her years, and loved better to hold by Geraldine's hand and listen to her words, than play with her gayer and younger sister, the little Florentia, who was just now alternately chasing a butterfly and trampling down the flower-beds, or gambolling with Misa the greyhound, once before mentioned in this history, who was grown by this time an old dog. But Lionel Weymouth had much to say to Geraldine, unfit for the quick ears of six years old to receive ; and urging that her sister wanted her companionship, and only half-enjoyed her sports without her, he enticed the docile child from the verandah to the garden.

For a period that might be counted by years, Geraldine had been content and serene in the presence of Lionel Weymouth. It is true that he was still the dearest object on earth to her heart: but her affection was so moulded with love for Florentia, and entire devotion to their children, that there was not one selfish feeling intermingled, or a thought she had need to hide from her own scrutiny, when remembering him as the husband of another. As much could not be said for Lionel Weymouth; for though worlds would not have tempted him to breathe a thought that could have disturbed the serenity he knew she had regained, there were regrets and convictions buried in the inmost recesses of his own heart, which, strive as he might to stifle and extinguish them, still burned on with constant power to torture. Laid out as in a map, he *now* could see how blessed a lot his life would have been with her whose true and long-tried love he had despised and rejected! What had it been for seven long years? A dream of unsatisfied longings, whose only waking reality had been Disappointment!

‘How kind of you,’ he exclaimed as soon as the child had left them — how kind of you to come thus promptly at my summons! Yet it is only like yourself; for I never yet knew you pause at a sacrifice of your own convenience.’

‘My dear friend,’ replied Geraldine, ‘you give me praise where I do not deserve it. My coming has been perfectly convenient; and now only let me stay as long as I can be useful.’

‘Then you must stay for ever,’ said Weymouth

mournfully; 'for you only have power to sway Florentia's anger. Even to you, Geraldine, it is a self-laceration for me to confess the agonies of the last six months. That I have been wronged or dishonored I do not believe; she is alike too pure and too proud for that. But the step I have taken in prohibiting this Italian the house, and intercepting their correspondence—I have never broken a seal, but burnt the letters unread—became imperative to save myself from insult, and her reputation from injury. Nay, Geraldine, do not weep, for your tears wring my heart more than my own sorrows.'

'This dreadful story,' murmured Geraldine, 'seems more than I can realize. In the same house, yet refuse to see you!—you the most indulgent husband I ever knew. Violent and indignant at this first assumption of authority, and declaring she has ceased to love you!'

'For a long time I have known that mournful truth,' he replied; and, as he continued, his countenance assumed the same rigid mould of suffering which occasioned once before, but by a far different scene, was never to be forgotten by Geraldine—'for a long time I have known that wretched truth. And with love extinguished, sympathy dwarfed and dying, and my imagination shamed from the falsity which painted everything between us in its own bright colors, I have no hope but for our children's sakes to maintain the respectabilities of life, and let Appearance cheat the world and stalk like a ghost above the grave of my happiness.'

'Happiness!' the word was echoed, but not by

Geraldine Harmer. At the moment Lionel had uttered it, Florentia glided into the room: she was attired in a loose white muslin wrapper, her long dark hair partially gathered up with a comb, but two or three heavy curls still falling on her shoulders; her cheeks were colorless, and her eyes heavy, as eyes become from want of sleep, or from the 'weight of unshed tears.' Geraldine's first impulse was to rise and embrace her; but Florentia waved her away, and resting her hand on the opposite side of the table which separated her from her husband also, she exclaimed, 'Do not touch me, my sister, my friend. It was because I dreaded your affection that I refused to see you an hour ago. I feel that I shall lose my senses if I am melted to softness or tears, and there are many things I wish to speak of calmly and clearly.'

Geraldine attempted some soothing reply, but the words died on her lips; and both she and Weymouth felt awed to silence and attention.

'I can read in your countenance,' she continued, addressing Geraldine, 'that *he* has made his deadly accusation; and only to you of all human beings, and only in his presence, would I deign to contradict this foulest charge. Hear me, just Heaven! By my children's sacred selves I swear it!' And raising the hand, already clenched, above her head, she poured forth asseverations of her innocence that were awful from the fervor and intensity of her expressions.

'He does not doubt you — he does not doubt you,' repeated Geraldine more than once ere the wretched wife comprehended her words: 'had you entered the room but a few minutes earlier, you would have heard his confident assertion.'

Mechanically, as it were, Florentia's eyes wandered from Geraldine's countenance to that of her husband, who, visibly affected, returned her gaze, it might be with more tenderness than she had seen in his looks for many a day. She took the hand he held towards her, and pressed it for a moment. 'If I have not to defend myself,' she said, but sinking now into a low chair that was beside her, 'it is fit I should make a confession of such things as are true. Ah, Geraldine Harmer, you little thought when I was saved from the ocean which ought to have been my grave, that I should live to hate my life, and most of all to hate the destiny by which you fostered and cherished me. And Lionel Weymouth, my husband, you little guessed when early in our married days you showed me the letters which, still preserved with care, had travelled to another hemisphere and back again — the letters from Geraldine, which told my story, that their perusal was the sowing of deadly seeds in my heart. Little more than a child, I was ignorant then of the heart's wants and its mysteries; but I lived quickly — and quickly learned a dreadful history. Yes, without knowing one detail, I know it — have long known it — as truly as if I were conscious of them all. You loved one another!'

'Hush!' said Lionel authoritatively; while Geraldine buried her face in her handkerchief, and could only by a gesture implore her to be silent.

'I must speak,' continued Florentia, but rising and bending over Geraldine, whom she caressed like a child. 'Sister, I do not think you ever knew how much I loved you. Nobody could love you as much

as I, because no one could know you so well; and when I left you for him — yes, even then there was an aching void in my heart that nothing but your presence could fill. A bad sign this, was it not? and such an one does not appear when pairs are mated by years, and sympathy and tastes, and a certain heart affection, that is not altogether what the world very falsely calls “love.” Well, the deadly knowledge came — the knowledge that lifted up a curtain and explained everything which had seemed a mystery. The secluded youth — the single life — the perfect faith — and the bitter requital. And I — I — the creature of your goodness — I, who so loved you, to have been the cause of a life’s misery — I who would have died for you a thousand cruel deaths — Geraldine, if I am mad do you have mercy on me.’ And Florentia, falling on her knees, flung her arms about the other as if she were indeed a maniac. Presently tears came to her relief, accompanied by deep drawn sobs.

It was a dreadful scene for all; but one that was not now to be ended suddenly or abruptly. Like swimmers plunged in deep water, they could not touch the shore of safer discourse in a moment.

‘How bitter was my knowledge,’ pursued Florentia, when she had become a little calmer, ‘words cannot tell: the more bitter because I soon perceived that, grown used to my fatal beauty — it was, that you both know it was that which drew him to me — he discovered that my thoughts were not his thoughts, my pleasures and pursuits not his. It is pleasant to be pupil and teacher sometimes; but not always, as we were. He wanted a friend more often, and I was only

a plaything. It might be different now, for my heart has grown old and wise lately ; but love once burnt out is never to be re-kindled ; however, I too had discoveries to make. It is not good to analyze one's affections very closely — happy people never do it — but I could not help such weakness, and I found that I too was unsatisfied. I found that I wanted the companionship of a young heart that had everything to *hope for* in life, instead of present existence to enjoy. I wearied of every luxury, directly its novelty was gone ; I wanted some one to laugh with my foolish thoughts and foolish deeds ; not *at*, or worse — rebuke them ; I wanted some one *with* whom, not *from* whom, hand in hand I could win my experience. I wanted a Young Heart to answer mine, even as he wanted one as wise and as gentle as yours.'

'One thing more,' she continued ; 'and it shall be said, if I die in the telling. In him whose name has been slanderously coupled with mine — the young poet, the exiled patriot — whose heart was one strong spring of hope and aspiration — whose love was the love of life or death, not like your English love !' — and her lip curled scornfully as she uttered the word — 'not like your English love, whose pulses are regulated by the jingling of your gold ; in *him* I recognised the soul's companion God had portioned for me. And yet we parted without a sign that could wrong my husband ; parted with the cold measured adieu of friendship ; parted without the utterance of one word that could open the tomb of either heart ! Now tell me for what I have to live ?'

While she had been speaking Florentia had taken

from the table the jewel-hilted dagger, which years before had been intended for some dark though unexplained purpose, but which from its costliness had been considered latterly a mere toy and ornament. She took it from its sheath, and felt with her hand the temper of the blade, which, blunted no doubt by time, and rusted from neglect, looked a less murderous weapon than it might formerly have done. Still there was something in the action which terrified Geraldine to a degree of which she felt almost ashamed, and coupled with the words, 'Tell me for what I have to live?' thrilled through her whole frame.

'Your children, Florentia!' she exclaimed with much feeling, and attempting at the same moment to take the dagger from her hand.

But Florentia started to her feet; there was a wild flash in her eyes which even Lionel noticed, and which communicated Geraldine's terrors to him. She clutched the dagger yet more tightly as she cried, 'My children! they will be better cared for by their step-mother than they could be by me; they will be better loved by their father than now, when the only impediment to his happiness is removed.'

'Florentia, you are mad to talk thus wildly,' exclaimed Weymouth, and attempting at the same moment to wrest the dagger from her grasp. But this was not to be easily done; and in the hand to hand struggle which ensued, the point grazed her throat, so that the blood flowed freely.

'Mad — mad — yes, I am mad!' she cried; 'but not mad enough to be frightened at such a stream as this;' and she resisted as earnestly as she could their attempts to stay the bleeding.

But let me not dwell on the terrors of a scene like this. Too many hearts there are so darkly learned that they can remember tragedies of human life, whose lurid light enables them to realize and understand those storms of passion which happier and less sadly experienced mortals can but feebly picture ; scenes in which some human heart seems in its anguish torn open, its sacred depths laid bare, and unimagined horrors dragged to light ! Before midnight, Florentia raved in the delirium of brain fever ! Raved chiefly of those two who were her most tender watchers — of her husband and Geraldine Harmer — recognising them at intervals, and perpetually joining their hands !

Physicians crowded round her, but all their efforts were unavailing. By-and-bye her thoughts receded to the days of her childhood, and she talked of her tropical home and her dark-browed mother ; yea, even with more precision than she had ever done by the light of life and reason ! Oh, Death and Madness, what mysteries are in your presence and your coming !

By degrees all newer memories were swept from the seared and troubled mind, until she spoke only of those early years ; of Netta the negress ; her mother ; the shipwreck ; and the scene of confiding the dagger ; but here she broke into the jargon of that mother tongue so long forgotten, and the words which might have been the revealing of an untold tale, died on the air without leaving a memory or a meaning behind them ! And who shall say oblivion was not the best grave for a record so dread ?

And Florentia, the young and the beautiful, died in the flower of her days ; died in her sorrow and mad-

ness ; died clasped fondly by the Two whose hearts for long years she had sundered ; the Two whom her death would, in the sure course of measured time, again make One ; the Two whose souls were yet so wrung by the anguish of that last scene, that not a thought of self had place in either heart, where not one gleam of light from the future had power to dispel the agony of the present.

It were a common figure of speech to say that Geraldine Harmer would have died to save that young life, and make its happiness. She had died a darker death for her sake — and another's — years ago. And not less true is it that at this dread hour the heart of Lionel Weymouth melted to a tenderness and affection he had not known even in the days of his passionate worship. The girlish wife — the early dead — the mother of his children — the once so wildly loved, were attributes that moulded into a sentiment and took root in his nature too deeply henceforth to change or depart.

How strange those Two should mourn the Dead together ! — and yet how natural ! cherishing each token of her presence, and embalming her memory by every affectionate tribute ! Why had she lived at all, or come like a meteor across their path ?

For some great purpose, inscrutable here, but decreed by a Power to whom our wisdom is folly.

How strange the second wooing of Geraldine Harmer by Lionel Weymouth — and yet how natural ! Life now wore a soberer hue than it had done some twenty years before ; but if happiness seemed less ecstatic, it was more serene and secure. She, whose

woman's life has thus been pencilled forth, is indeed a loving 'mother' to the Geraldine and Florentia—who, 'sisters' in truth, are almost shielded by guardian hands from even children's sorrows. But the Life of the Heart? Ah, that for *them* is still in the future.

Time heals ever as he touches; softening even the harshest outlines by distance; and there is not a thing in the Past of which Lionel Weymouth and his wife cannot now talk freely and calmly. They stood one day near the drawing-room window already mentioned. It was months after their marriage, and two years since Florentia's death. Her children were playing in the verandah before them; the younger grown a little more stately with the increase of two years to her little life, while the elder had become gayer in a like proportion, so that strangers would have failed to see the different outlines of character, which they who loved them best nevertheless understood.

'Geraldine,' said Lionel—his arm was round her waist, and he had been looking fondly in her face for a minute or two—'Geraldine, in my eyes you were never so beautiful as you now are. No, not even in the bloom of youth. I loved you *then* as well as my untried nature was capable of loving; but had I loved you as you deserved to be loved, I should not even have seen the change which I suppose ten years of absence worked. Or if I had seen I should have approved—should have felt that to be other than yourself precisely would have left something wanting—should have thought and known——.' He paused a moment.

‘What?’ asked Geraldine, looking up, and fondly kissing the hand she held in hers.

‘I should have known,’ he replied, ‘that Love depends for its birth and existence on something quite irrespective of Youth and Beauty.’

THE SHAWL BUYER.

AN INCIDENT OF 1843.

BRANCHING off from one of those wide, leading, ever-crowded streets, which are aptly called the arteries of the metropolis, is a certain insignificant turning, which not even boasting itself as a thoroughfare, is seldom remarked by the hurried pedestrian, unless he have business in one of the half dozen dull, dingy looking houses which rise on each side of the avenue. Yet at one corner, with windows embracing both sides of the house, is a certain shop, which may be called linen-draper's, hosier's, glover's, or, if you will, an outfitting warehouse — so varied and crowded does the merchandise seem. Perhaps, however, my readers will better understand the description if I call it a *ticketing shop*. Yes, there are doubtless at this moment suspended the Brobdignag tickets expressive of shillings, accompanied by microscopic pence ; while ribbons, gloves, and other trifling wares, are placed temptingly forward, decorated with legible inky intimations of pence, which on a nearer inspection one finds encumbered with mystical figures, traced as it appears, by an HH. pencil, and signifying three farthings. The shop door

faces the great thoroughfare ; the private door is in the narrow, unfrequented street. The latter is but little used ; and on the step of it on a certain day, last October, were seated two meanly clad women. Both were apparently in abject poverty — nay, they might be mendicants, for aught the passer-by could tell ; yet if he paused a moment, and his eyes had the privilege of direct communication with his understanding, he would feel assured that they were very different beings. Companions, associates, they might be, and were, the strange fellow-laborers which adversity yokes together ; but this was all.

The younger of the two, who looked about five-and-thirty years of age, and whose tattered apparel was black, was weeping bitterly, and rocking to and fro on the cold stone in her anguish. The countenance of the other seemed one that had been distorted by many a violent passion ; and, moreover, was not unused to the debasing influence of intemperance.

‘ Mary Morris,’ said the latter, addressing her companion, ‘ I wonder you can be such a fool — to grieve about one of them rich people ! Let them sicken, and die ; what should we care ? For my part I like to see them suffer, and know they are miserable ; it’s a comfort, that it is.’

‘ Oh, Hannah, don’t talk so,’ said the other through her tears.

‘ But I shall talk so. Don’t they grind us down to what we are ? You say, it is the shopkeepers, and that the ladies know nothing about the price we get. I say, they ought to know.’

‘ They don’t think.’

‘But they ought to think.’

‘Well, Hannah, don’t let us quarrel.’

‘That is what you always say when you are crying and moping. Only yesterday, said I to myself, she’s getting over Nancy’s death; and though we may be next door to starving, we sha’n’t have crying and wailing from morning to night.’

‘Getting over Nancy’s death! Oh, God, have mercy!’ And the wretched, childless widow raised her thin hands and streaming eyes to Heaven. ‘O God, have mercy!’ she continued, ‘though unworthy am I to ask it.’

‘Well,’ returned the other, ‘I think we had better go home — such a home as it is: — two chairs, and an empty cupboard; three sticks and a handful of cinders; two cups and a broken teapot; a kettle without a handle; two forks and one knife; — that’s all, isn’t it?’

‘You forget the bed — *her* gift.’

‘Well, it was a bed which we were not used to, that made us oversleep ourselves, and so lose a day’s work.’

‘Cruel!’ murmured the widow — ‘because we were five minutes beyond the hour. But it does not prove,’ she continued, in a firmer voice, ‘that the customers know nothing of the pay we get; because it must be to avoid our seeing them, that they give out the work before eight o’clock.’

‘If it had not been for our coming this afternoon to see if they’d advance us a shilling on next week’s work,’ muttered the elder woman, ‘you’d never have known who bought the shawl — I am sure I wish you didn’t.’

‘Oh, Hannah!’ said the widow Morris, ‘be human

—be what you were five years ago, when first I knew you, or, when long after that, you and I and my blessed child, first made one room our home.’

‘Now, don’t preach.’

‘I would rather ATONE.’

Very different was the scene that might have been witnessed only half a dozen streets distant from that cold damp step, where the shivering women held their strange discourse. A party of three — father, mother, and daughter — had just finished dinner; and though twilight was now fast deepening into night, they had not asked for candles, but were content with the cheering rays of a bright fire, which, as almost the first fire of the season, was doubly enjoyable. They were something better than a merry trio — they were a *happy* one; the clouds of adversity which for three years had darkened the world to them, had lately passed away, and now, with grateful hearts, made better and wiser, they basked once more in the sunshine of prosperity, and tasted its sweets, as those only who have known suffering can do. Mr. Greville was a merchant, who, from the unprincipled conduct of his partner, had been reduced, three years before, from affluence to a pennyless condition. Yet he had had enough to pay all claimants, so that his honor was unscathed; and my sketch from life has nothing more to do with the struggles which followed, than to paint their effect upon character. Though there was little probability that he would ever again be a rich man, there was a rational prospect of ease and competence; and one of the invaluable lessons he and his family had

learned, was to be more than content with such a lot. His domestic happiness, too, was complete ; for Lucy, his only child, was about to wed one every way worthy of her, and who, having been tried by adversity, had not been found wanting.

‘It certainly is very delightful,’ said Lucy, seating herself on a low stool, and leaning her head against her mother’s knee, ‘quite a luxury, once again to have my long mornings to myself, to read, or work, or write, or, best of all, practise myself, instead of counting one, two, three, to dull children, and suffer the torture of wrong notes and faulty time. But all is for the best ; I should never have felt it to be a luxury if I had not fagged as a music teacher in the manner I have done. So do not draw a long face, dear papa ; I am a great deal wiser and better, and consequently happier, for all that has happened. Though, I suppose, I ought not to be happy to-day, for I have had my first quarrel with Edward.’

‘Not a very serious one, I think,’ said Mr. Greville, ‘or you would not smile about it.’

‘I hope not,’ replied the mother, anxiously, ‘for I always warned you to keep off the *first* quarrel.’

‘Dear mamma,’ said Lucy, pressing her hand, ‘as if we could really quarrel ! The truth is, now that there is no actual necessity for it, Edward disapproves of my walking out by myself ; and though I tried to make him understand the sure protection of a shabby dress and old-fashioned bonnet, he only answered, that he disapproved of them also. Now, though I have not quite given in, we have come to a compromise ; I have promised never to go out alone, unless there be a real

necessity for my doing so, and he has magnanimously left it to my own conscience to decide whether there be such a necessity or not.'

'Edward is quite right, my child.'

'Perhaps he is; but after having taught myself, and not easily, to feel independent, I seem to have lost my liberty. The worst of it is, this point of conscience is more binding than a fixed rule; for instance, I wished very much to go and see the poor widow Morris, this morning, but I could not prove to my conscience that the visit was one of *necessity*.'

'I want to know more about this poor woman,' said Mrs. Greville, 'I hope, my dear Lucy, you have not been wasting your time, and sympathy, and money, upon an impostor.'

'Little have I had of the last to bestow, and my sympathy I could not withhold, That she is not one of those faultless heroines of humble life, which are found, I suspect, only in novels, I admit; and if we, dear mother, had never known trouble ourselves, I dare say my heart would have hardened against her, when I found out she was no such pattern of perfection.'

'I can hardly fancy,' said Mr. Greville, smiling, 'that it is my Lucy, not three-and-twenty till Christmas, talking so like a philosopher.'

'Better smile than frown, *mio padre*; and if you will promise not to call me *blue* when I talk from my heart at home, I give you my word I will discourse glibly in society on the last new novel, the favorite dancer, the elegance of Louis Quatorze furniture, Berlin wool-work, and, when the Exhibitions open, of any or all the pictures to be found in the Catalogues.'

‘Although you are no artist?’

‘Certainly, for these are considered lady-like topics; and though I start and almost shudder, at hearing the daring and opinionated manner in which the utterly ignorant and inexperienced talk of *Art*, without their seeming to guess at the subtle genius and tedious labor of the *artist*, I observe there is a by-law of society, which forbids a lady conversing on many much simpler matters, under the penalty of being called Blue.’

‘Pray what do you call simpler matters, my little enthusiast?’

‘What you call me, papa, a little philosopher for talking about, but which seem to me simple truths, discoverable by almost involuntary observation and reflection. Not, I dare say, that I should ever have observed or thought, had I continued the rich merchant’s daughter — or at least have not observed or thought of the same things. For instance, had I not twice a-week, all the spring and summer, left home at eight o’clock, I should not have met each morning the poor widow Morris, and so could not have observed how she grew thinner and thinner, and shabbier and shabbier; and so could not have *thought*, when I saw her (after missing her for a fortnight) in tattered black, and weeping bitterly, that she was in some sore affliction; and thus could never have spoken to her, and learned her history.’

‘I always thought her very wrong,’ said Mrs. Greville, ‘to suffer you to enter her wretched hovel, only one day after her child, having died of small-pox, had been taken from it.’

‘It was wrong, mamma,’ returned Lucy; ‘and when I discovered of what disease the child had died, though it was not till weeks afterwards, I told her frankly — almost severely — of her error. There was no denial — no defence on her part; but, for the first time, I perceived the marked difference between herself and the woman who shares her wretched room. No change passed over the face of the latter, unless indeed it were not a fancy of mine that she rather smiled than otherwise, as she bent over her work. On the contrary, poor Morris trembled and wept, as if some new feeling were awakened in her heart, or as if a ray of light had streamed upon her dark mind. Since then ——’

Here Miss Greville was interrupted by a servant who entered, saying, ‘A poor woman, named Morris, begged leave to speak to her.’

‘How very strange!’ cried Lucy, — ‘I never gave her our address.’

‘Let her come in,’ said Mr. Greville, — and in another minute the unhappy widow stood before them. Paler she was than ever, and either she was grown still thinner, and so looked taller; or it might be her tattered mourning hung each day closer and closer, or perhaps some innate consciousness of acting rightly made her figure more erect; and certainly she possessed a composure and dignity of manner which sensibly interested both Mr. and Mrs. Greville. Yet when she began to speak, composure seemed gone, for her words were scarcely articulate.

‘Sit down,’ said Mrs. Greville kindly; ‘you are, I think, the person for whom my daughter feels very much interested?’ And while the lady spoke, her

husband poured out a glass of wine for the now trembling widow. The word and act of kindness loosened the flood-gates of her soul — tears came to her relief — and in a few moments she was able to tell her story with some degree of distinctness.

‘You, my lady,’ said Mary Morris, addressing Lucy in the style which the very humble, to lady or no lady, usually adopt — ‘you have often listened to my complainings till the tears started to your bright eyes ; and indeed — indeed — I would not risk calling them there again, were it not that what I have to tell concerns you.’

‘What can be the matter ? You alarm me,’ interrupted Mrs. Greville.

‘Under heaven the danger is over,’ continued the widow solemnly. ‘I sometimes wonder if I have done right in telling her a story of such misery and abject want as mine. Yet that is past — she has learnt how I sank from being a respectable servant, step by step, to the wretched, friendless creature I am. Forgive me for saying friendless,’ she proceeded, turning again to Lucy, ‘I shall be so again, and feel as if I were already. My marriage ten years ago was against the advice of those who knew better than myself ; and when I found out that my husband was worthless, a sort of shame kept me away from all my old associates. But human beings cannot live alone in a great city ; and from shrinking from his acquaintances as at first I did, in time I grew to tolerate them. This was my great error. No wonder that when the hour of need came, my early and true friends were disinclined to aid me. They had lost faith in me ; and though, thank

Heaven, no one deep sin darkens my conscience, a host of circumstances in which I witnessed wrong in others, with scarcely an opposition on my part, crowd my memory to tell me they were right. I am a good needle-woman, and, when my husband died, might have supported my child and myself in comfort and respectability. But there was no one whose word would be taken to speak for me, where I might have procured good work; and wanting daily bread as I did, I gladly accepted the wretched pittance given for what they call slop-work. But perhaps, my ladies, you do not know what that is?’

‘Indeed they do,’ said Mr. Greville; ‘are you not aware that several cases of distress have come to light, in which the hard usage of the employers is so apparent, that the public attention is drawn to the subject, and we must hope some increase of remuneration will be adopted.’

‘I told her so — I told her so,’ cried the widow with much feeling. ‘I told her, if the gentlefolks only knew how shamefully we were paid, — for work as I have done for eighteen hours a day, I could not get more than seven pence, — they would see us righted. But she always said no; that ladies and gentlemen never bought our sort of work — and that things they did buy, they would have at the cheapest, *without staying to think if it were possible to live by making them*. All this hardened my heart — which I thought had grown dead to every feeling. But it was not dead to kindness — the first that had been shown to me for years. It was a few weeks before my child died, that instead of plain work, I undertook some curious

knitting in wool according to a certain pattern. However, the work was so much more tedious than I expected, that the lady for whom it was ordered, made some other purchase instead, which induced the shopkeeper to take it on his own hands. And being a winter article, never till this morning was it unpacked and exposed in his window for sale.'

'Go on,' said Lucy, for the widow paused — 'go on; I cannot guess what all this leads to.'

'Do you remember,' proceeded Mary Morris, in a quivering voice, — 'do you remember how you trembled and turned pale, when you first learned my little Nancy had died of small-pox? We had been too poor to pay for her vaccination — and — and — like many others — too idle — too thoughtless to take her where it would have been done for nothing. Do you remember how you reproved me for my negligence, which, perhaps, I should have heeded less, had you not told me that *you* had an especial dread of the disease, having lost a dear friend by it, who, like yourself, had never been susceptible of the usual preventative? Do you remember how you implored me to destroy every article belonging to the child? Lady — lady —' and the widow's voice rose with her emotion — 'lady, the black and crimson knitted shawl you bought this morning was knitted in that infected chamber, and even, from our scarcity of clothing, was wrapped round my dying Nancy!'

'Horrible — horrible!' exclaimed Mrs. Greville, starting from her chair. 'Lucy — surely, Lucy, you have not worn it?'

'Be calm, dear mother,' replied Miss Greville,

with tearful eyes — ‘I have not even touched it, except with my glove.’

‘Thank God!’ murmured Mary Morris.

‘It was to be sent home this evening,’ continued Lucy; ‘I do not think it is yet come.’

‘And never will,’ returned the widow, ‘every particle is reduced to ashes.’

‘My poor Morris,’ said Lucy, touched to the heart, ‘tell us how you have done this — how you *could* do it.’

‘You will bear with me, while I tell all my thoughts:’ and the poor woman felt that her audience was no indifferent one. ‘I know not what it may be, but I do know that a cloud has passed over you, and that, young as you are, you have seen sorrow. It was this that made your words go to *my* heart, for they came from *yours*; it was this that made you wise, oh! so much wiser than many that are old. It was this that taught me to tell you my griefs, and to own my errors; for the very happy — those who have always been happy — seldom understand sorrow; and it is hard to make them comprehend the temptations of poverty. It was you who taught me to feel human affection again — for I knew that I loved you when I found I rejoiced that your eye was brighter, your cheek more rosy, your step more light, and your voice more cheerful than before. You were leaning on the arm of a handsome gentleman to-day, when I saw you admire, through the window, that very infected shawl; and I knew by the turn of his head that he loved you, and I knew that you would not suffer one to look so, if his love were not allowed. I saw you go into the shop; I saw the shawl taken

down ; I peered through the door, and knew that you bought it. My heart smote me, but my thoughts were too confused for me to act at the moment — nor was my conscience thoroughly awakened till afterwards. I pictured you sick and suffering. I thought even you might die — or I thought you might rise changed, disfigured, with beauty for ever gone — and I thought, would the handsome gentleman love you the same as now ? for lady, dear young lady, such things have been ; and the woman who is loved, should cherish her beauty yet more than she who hopes to win a heart. Well, all these thoughts struggling in my mind made me nearly wild. I went to the shopkeeper, and told him the story : he only laughed, until I threatened to relate it to you. I afterwards manœuvred to see the parcel, which was packed and directed, for as I evidently knew you, it never occurred to him that I was ignorant of your address, and so he took no pains to conceal it. On my returning him the four shillings he paid me for the knitting, and the three shillings the material cost, he at last gave it up ; and he will tell you a version of the story, taking, no doubt, some credit to himself, and beg you to receive some other article for the pound at which I saw it was priced.'

'Your conduct,' said Mr. Greville, with emotion, 'has, in this instance, been so admirable, that it extenuates a hundred faults. But, in the abject poverty you describe, how did you procure the sum of seven shillings ?'

'I — I — pawned the bed the dear young lady sent me yesterday.'

'But you shall sleep on it to-night,' cried Mr. Gre-

ville, drawing a sovereign from his purse, 'with an easy conscience, and, I trust, a lighter heart than usual.'

'It cannot be,' said the widow, calmly — 'though my heart is lighter, and I am happier than I have been for many years. I feel once more that I may dare to hope to meet my little Nancy in Heaven — and in this world I am resigned to my fate.'

'What is it you mean?'

'I must tell you the whole truth — though I did not mean it — or you will misjudge me. Hannah Wilkins and I have parted — indeed, though we rented the room between us, the things are all hers. The scraps I had were made away with when poor Nancy lay ill.'

'I suppose,' said Mr. Greville, with some penetration, 'she quarrelled with you for parting with the bed?'

The widow bowed her head, and tears again gushed forth.

'Whatever present inconvenience may arise to you,' continued Mr. Greville, 'I rejoice at the separation; for it is evident to me, that your companion has heightened every temptation which has crossed your path, and weakened every good resolution that has arisen in your mind. Above most things, should rich or poor shun such associates. Now that I have learned your story, I recognise you as persons of whom I chanced the other day to hear something. It may be some encouragement for the future, for you to know that even the poor pittance you have been able to earn, has been in consequence of your better character. Her future is easily seen, — she will sink to perfect beggary. But tell me, have you a roof to shelter you?'

'I thought you would have reproached me,' sobbed

the widow — ‘turned me away from your door. And I am used to anger and upbraidings. I never thought I should tell you — I go to-night to ask admission into the workhouse.’

‘No, no,’ cried Mr. Greville — ‘no need for that.’

‘Suppose,’ said Lucy, laying her hand kindly on the widow’s arm — ‘suppose you take the sovereign papa has placed before you — recover your bed — hire a clean little room to yourself — and —’

‘We will find some oddments to furnish it,’ said Mrs. Greville, continuing the speech her daughter had hesitated finishing.

‘And you shall make me a shawl, precisely like that I bought to-day,’ exclaimed Lucy; ‘and for your labor you shall be fairly paid; — this will be a beginning, till we can find more regular work for you.’

‘I think,’ said Mrs. Greville, with a smile that made Lucy blush — ‘I think we alone shall find plenty of work for you between this and Christmas, — for a wedding without new clothes is like — is like —’

‘Christmas without plum-pudding,’ said Mr. Greville, impatient for a simile.

‘Summer without flowers,’ cried his more poetical wife.

The widow was too happy for aught save tears, and blessings on her benefactors.

‘I wonder,’ murmured Mr. Greville, after a long pause — ‘I wonder if, when we cannot be roused to humanity by the knowledge of suffering, it is decreed that we must be *frightened* into it in self-defence? Little he knows, I fear, of the human heart, who has never been tempted!’

Should this sketch from real life meet the eye of a child of toil, of want, of penury, not in vain will it have been committed to paper, if a sentence therein strengthens one good resolve, or loosens one strong chain of habit that binds to evil thoughts or bad example. Not in vain, if it makes him understand that the rich cannot relieve the want they do not know. And, oh ! not in vain, if it makes some favorite of fortune turn with pitying heart and open hand to the toil-worn and starving. Not too ambitious for a *prayer* is it, that my simple story may be one of the many grains in the heavy balance, to prompt our country's Sages and Senators, to plan wisely for their humble, oppressed, but industrious countrywomen, whose ill-repaid, life-wearing toil, has lately been brought to their notice.

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THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY.

A STORY IN SIX CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

ARE not Houses strangely typical of their Inhabitants, or, is it that when we know both, we grow to identify them one with the other? It may sometimes be so; yet certainly there was a natural harmony between Lauder Manor House and the family which occupied it a very few years ago. It was a substantial red-brick pile, not purely in the Elizabethan style, yet reminding a stranger of it, and to the impressible observer suggestive of staid propriety, of monotonous routine, and of a hospitality more likely to be measured and precise, than impulsive and genial. It was a noble building, nevertheless; though so hidden, as if with a proud reserve, by old solemn trees, that only when winter had bared their branches, could the house at all be seen, from even the distance of a few hundred yards. The grounds were extensive, and, to a certain degree, well cultivated; but the head gardener was old, and old-fashioned, and no one ever thought of coming to Lady Macdonald for a choice flower or early fruit.

There was a stately portico to Lauder House, which

ed into a large square hall, tessellated with black and white marble. One side of the hall was nearly occupied by a chamber organ, opposite to which stretched a wide fire-grate, which had been artificially contracted by an iron back and false sides ; while the tall mantel-piece was surmounted by various showy heraldic emblazonments. But what visitors chiefly noticed, and what faced them on their entrance, was a glazed press, in which rested the faded, tarnished, moth-eaten coat of a general officer, together with his sword and gloves. The reception rooms — all on the ground-floor — were spacious, but not very lofty, and, though furnished in a substantial and even costly manner, were singularly devoid of modern adornments. For nearly forty years the style of that mansion had remained unchanged ; and yet there was nothing about expressive of decay. Chintz had been replaced by chintz, once, twice, thrice, of a similar pattern to that which Lady Macdonald had esteemed in her bridal days. Picture and looking-glass frames had been re-gilt, but never changed, and the vulture-like bird that surmounted a convex mirror, and held in its beak a necklace of glass, seemed as brightly burnished in 184—, as it could have been when the century was new. At least there was no anachronism in the furniture ; the sideboard beneath the mirror was spindle-legged ; the dining-table before it was long and narrow ; the heavy moreen curtains were edged with black velvet ; and the leathern chairs were of that awkward shape common before the revival of high backs.

Neither did the drawing-room chintz cover lounging fauteuils or comfortable ottomans. True, there were

a couple of large bed-like sofas, with straggling sofa-tables drawn before them, but Rip, the old Blenheim spaniel, had far more comfort of the cushions than any one else. At any rate, Lady Macdonald was consistent; and as she expected starched propriety from others, she did not indulge in lounging habits herself. .

Three sides of the house were bleak-looking and bare, but the south wall — which, by the way, looked only towards the kitchen garden — was almost covered with jasmines and China roses; the branches of which peeped into the windows of a room that was still called a nursery, although its chief occupant, the granddaughter of Lady Macdonald, was already sixteen, and womanly for her years. At the time to which I allude, she was said to be finishing her education under a German governess.

But before I speak of Agnes, I must go back, and trace the outlines of a life, that in its marked, unbending course, had exercised a strange influence over the destiny of others. Lady Macdonald, *née* Margaret Ford, was in right of her mother an heiress, and endowed by nature with no ordinary share of self-possession and self-esteem; the education bestowed on her, with perpetual reference to her future position, had fostered and developed her innate qualities, until pride became her dominant characteristic. But it was a pride allied to excellent abilities and strict integrity. When she was eighteen, her father shocked and offended her — for from sheer force of character she was already the one to receive appeals, not offer them — by making a second marriage, choosing a wife who

had youth and beauty, but was of poor and obscure family.

The young wife must have quailed at the haughty reception given by her step-daughter; and yet it was a sort of haughtiness that had in it nothing tangible enough to justify resentment. Perhaps her father's marriage hastened a decision which she never found occasion to repent. From many suitors of high degree, she chose an elderly Peninsular officer, of ancient Scottish lineage, who had won green laurels to cover his scars, had obtained more honor than gold, and had refused a Baronetcy until it was accompanied by a Military order of Knighthood.

To do her justice, the heiress was neither avaricious nor purse-proud; she made a handsome life-settlement on her father, notwithstanding his *mésalliance*; and notwithstanding her wealth, her youth, her beauty, and her own 'sixteen quarterings,' she thought herself ennobled in becoming the wife of General Sir Andrew Macdonald. Perhaps it was only such a husband that she could ever honestly have promised to obey. But he had commanded men, and led them on to great deeds; and, without a sacrifice, she could bend her spirit to his. Had she been a vain woman, she would doubtless have proved a heedless, selfish, self-willed wife, striving to rule her middle-aged lord; but she was a proud one, and a part of her pride was to be meek, loving, gentle, and obedient to him. They were admirably mated, and the few years of their wedded life were supremely happy.

Meanwhile two daughters were born to her father, and she herself became the mother of an only son.

Years passed on ; and in Life's kaleidoscope changes, Death was busy. First Sir Andrew, whose constitution had never thoroughly recovered the trials of military service, passed to the tomb, leaving his young wife sole guardian of their son. I do not pause to tell of the widow's grief. Lady Macdonald had deep affections beneath her pride, though they were less demonstrative in gladness than capable of being probed by pain. Next faded and died her father's wife ; and Mr. Ford, now an old man, did not long survive the breaking up of his domestic life ; — the shadow that fell where a cheerful presence had been, seemed always beckoning him to follow. Mary Ford was fifteen, and Hester thirteen, when they were orphaned — thrown on the charity of their wealthy half-sister. Lady Macdonald was generous as well as just ; and when people do a kindness, it is strange indeed if they must not do it in their own way. And yet the heart may rebel at what the reason approves !

Old enough to be their mother, she took at once the tone of authority as well as of protection ; but never knew how hard to their young natures was the discipline she enforced. Idolized by their parents, caressed, indulged by them almost to folly, they had been what are called spoiled children ; but I believe girls will stand a very great deal of the sort of spoiling they had experienced without much detriment. But now, and even in the early days of their heart-sorrow, were to be assumed the starched manners, and endured the hard study beneath a rigid governess of fifty, whose sensibility had been dried up by the chill atmosphere of her profession, which, after thirty years, had left her the

skilled teacher of facts, and nothing more. Her mental world must have been a vast tomb, where the dry bones of knowledge stalked with a sort of galvanic life. Cold companion ; stern teacher for children who were growing fast into true women ; pining for tenderness, though they knew not how to name their want.

Mary at seventeen eloped with an old playmate, hardly three years her senior. And, through long years unforgiven, was looked on as 'The Black Sheep of the Family.' Hester, not without a history, was, in 184—, the maiden lady of a certain age.

The young Sir Andrew was married at twenty to a wife of his mother's choosing. He happened to like the young lady very well, and the year of their married life was a peaceful one. She died in presenting him with a daughter ; and he who, notwithstanding his pedigree, was but a common-place specimen of the country gentleman, was killed at three-and-twenty by an accident while deer-stalking.

Again was Lady Macdonald left the guardian of a child — the little Agnes.

CHAPTER II.

THE snow lay deep, but the frost bound it together, and made for the time being a firm pavement of its treacherous masses. A little more wind, and the weather would have been Siberian ; as it was, the air seemed at rest, and the bare boughs were motionless,

save when a famishing bird swayed some light twig. The day was light for Christmas-time in England, although the sun had not once peeped from its whitish hood of clouds. In short, it was a true winter's day.

Hester Ford, well clad in velvet and fur, was evidently prepared for walking or riding, yet lingered, leaning beside the tall chimney-piece in the chintz drawing-room, as if she had still something to say to her sister. A large Indian screen was drawn in a semicircle towards the fire, and seemed to portion off a lesser chamber within the room. Lady Macdonald, on the opposite side of the fire, was plying her needle — thanks to her spectacles — making up coarse flannel for poor people. Her words, fortunately, led to the topic which her companion at once hesitated, yet longed, to approach.

‘My dear,’ she exclaimed good-humoredly, ‘you were very idle yesterday, and now you are leaving me your share of hemming and sewing to complete.’

When in her most affable mood, lady Macdonald always called her younger sister ‘my dear.’

‘I plead guilty,’ replied Hester, ‘but, sister, some other time I will make up for my negligence, and work most diligently for you. To-day — O Margaret! let me tell you something that has happened.’

A shade of displeasure passed over the elder lady's countenance, and she replied in an altered tone, yet without looking up from her employment — ‘There is but one subject, I believe, between us, which ever needs a croaking note of preparation; and I have observed you are fond of introducing it at Christmas time.’

‘It is true ; because the season, with all its joy and holiness, is a sad anniversary ; because it vividly recalls the fault of an inexperienced girl, and because the outcast herself has more than once chosen it for her vain attempts at reconciliation.’

‘I am to understand, then, that you are in correspondence with your sister,’ returned Lady Macdonald, still stitching on in her orderly manner ; ‘you know that my wish is never to hear her name ; but if a stranger sent me a message, I must listen to it. Does she want money ?’ and as she spoke she glanced at a cheque-book, which chanced to lie open on the table.

‘No : — the early trials, the bitter sorrows of that worst poverty, the poverty of the well-born and well-bred, are over ; her husband’s talents appear to be duly recognised ; fame brings gold in its train, and poor Mary feels that only your forgiveness is necessary to her happiness.’

‘She must have learned by this time to do very well without it ; and the triumph of her present prosperity cannot incline her very much to repentance.’

‘It may be, sister, that she looks upon her sorrows and disappointments — and they have been many — as sufficient punishment for her error ; but it is since she has seen her own daughters growing towards womanhood, that she has fully recognised the wrong she did you, has thoroughly comprehended your generosity, and the earnest manner in which you strove to perform a mother’s part to both of us.’

‘I endeavored to do what I thought right, but I have never attached any particular merit to the performance of a duty.’

‘I know that full well. Yet, Margaret, if you could make allowances for weaker natures than your own — for temptation — youth. Poor Mary! it is only reconciliation that she asks — if ——’

‘I cannot,’ said Lady Macdonald, not quite unmoved, though she spoke without resting from her work. ‘Yet do not fancy that I am dragging the burthen of an animosity with me towards the grave. I would not injure her, and perhaps, under other circumstances, it might have been different. I cannot tell — but I could not look little Agnes in the face if I had forgiven my sister her fault. I wonder at you, Hester, interceding — you who, in the hour of your girlish temptation, behaved so differently.’

‘Life is a strange riddle,’ said Hester with evident bitterness, the tears standing in her still fine eyes. ‘I sometimes think that none of us are born to happiness or content. If I tell you what I never yet have owned — if I aver that with all your generosity, the ease, luxury, affluence I have enjoyed, there have been hours when I have repented of that which you esteem my chief merit — when I would have given every joy on earth to recall the true heart I banished — if ——’

‘Hush — hush!’ said Lady Macdonald, dropping her work at last, and pressing her hands to her ears as if to crush out the sound, ‘let me not hear such words.’

‘Forgive — forget — them!’ exclaimed Hester, with quick remorse; ‘they were words of folly and insanity, wrung from my distress. My heart aches for poor Mary’s disappointment, and again must I be the instrument of it.’

‘You are writing to your sister, then, I presume?’

‘I am going to see her, Margaret — to meet her by appointment at D——. She tells me she has something urgent to communicate, but to relieve any anxiety such words might occasion, she hints that she has no new or personal distress to relate; and that, on the contrary, her husband is prospering at last beyond their highest ambition. Possibly you saw his knighthood mentioned in the newspapers?’ added Hester, with some hesitation.

‘I did. A painter of pictures knighted!’ And Lady Macdonald shrugged her shoulders with contemptuous pity for the degeneracy of the age; after a moment she continued, ‘When are you going? D—— is six miles distant — have you ordered the carriage?’

‘I have — and I have not. I begged that the horses might be put to, but not brought round without further orders.’

‘Why was this, Hester? You ought to know that I am always best pleased when I see that you act without control. You know that you are always mistress of one carriage; this was part of my bond when you gave up Mr. Gerald Wentmore, and I always wish to pay my debts.’

‘Yet,’ said Hester, ‘I could not take your carriage on such a mission without your sanction. If ——’

‘Go, go — I wish to avoid scenes!’ and Lady Macdonald rang the bell as she spoke.

In the momentary silence which ensued, the door behind the screen certainly opened and closed; then opened again, so that it was another minute before the servant appeared.

‘The carriage for Miss Ford, directly,’ said Lady Macdonald, in her stateliest tone.

‘Margaret!’ sobbed Hester, stretching out both her hands, and taking one of her sister’s between her own, where passively it rested — ‘Margaret, kiss me before I go; I love you better — I am more grateful than you think.’

Lady Macdonald stooped her tall figure to kiss her sister’s cheek, and something like a vital movement crept through the passive hand, and responded to Margaret’s pressure.

CHAPTER III.

IF not precisely the ‘*best inn’s best room*,’ it was, at all events, a comfortable apartment in which the long separated sisters met — making allowance, of course, for that certain baldness and bareness, and unhome look, from which we doubt much if there is an hotel in Europe that is thoroughly free. Perhaps a long residence in one may warm and shapen the place into a home fashion; but generally a mental shivering fit has to be encountered at the threshold. However, Lady Shafton — lady in right of her husband, Sir William’s, knighthood — had drawn the sofa and an easy chair near the blazing fire, had spied and dragged from its dark corner a faded footstool, had arranged the blinds to the pleasantest light, and had ordered a delicate, well-chosen luncheon to be ready at the appointed

hour. A poet is said to be 'born,' not 'made,' and so, I am sure, is a hostess, who, to charm by her spiriting, must have a large warm heart, a ready wit, and a thoughtful and thoroughly unselfish nature. Lady Shafton was a born hostess. In her husband's struggling days, she had made the home of poverty gracious, and frugal fare sometimes a banquet to their few but sincere friends, by the genial welcome she so naturally displayed: in dawning prosperity, her gift had but developed with opportunity; and now, even in her hired apartment, it was her nature to make glad preparation for the most welcome of guests. She saw the carriage from the window, and recognised her sister's unchanged liveries; but the wearers were strange to her — Lady Macdonald not being remarkable for keeping her servants for any very lengthened term.

Tearful was the meeting, and for a time nearly speechless. The self-appointed hostess drew Hester to the easy chair — she loosened her bonnet, she drew off her mantle, she kissed her twenty times, and then their tears dried away into smiles and gladness; and, after a little while, they sat hand in hand, and discoursed, without ecstasies, like rational creatures.

Hester's last visit to her sister had been, years before, in obscure London lodgings; but there was something that legibly enough marked the difference between the then and now. In the first place, Lady Shafton was much better dressed than Hester had ever seen her; and dress makes more difference to looks than people think they *ought* to allow, — very especially after what some one calls 'the sharp corner of thirty-five' is turned. Then she was a little, just a

little, stouter ; and that fact also was rather an advantage to her *seconde jeunesse*. Certain lines of care, which had given a half-sad, half-thoughtful expression to her countenance, seemed almost to have passed away, and the fine eye — with the Fords a family feature, and which lenient time generally touches the last — seemed more radiant than ever.

‘How good of you to come here!’ exclaimed Hester, after half an hour’s chat had exhausted the immediate topic of Lady Macdonald’s obduracy, ‘and to come alone this long way.’

‘Nay, Edward, your godson, is my escort. He could not come to D—— without seeing the Cathedral, but he will be back to luncheon. You will not know him, I expect — five feet ten and a half, and barely nineteen : quite manly enough to take care of his little mama, as he very impertinently calls me.’

‘How happy your children must be!’ mused Hester, with a smile, and her musing, after a moment, was spoken.

‘I hope they are. People tell me they are spoilt, and I know what is meant by that misapplied word ; but I call children more “spoilt” when they are made false and frightened by severity, than ever they were by kindness. However, this reminds me that I want to catechise you, before Edward returns, and before I tell you what circumstances induced me to journey seventy miles this mid-winter weather, besides the pleasure and delight of meeting you.’

‘Catechise me?’ asked Hester, with evident surprise.

‘Yes, concerning our sister’s grand-daughter, our

grand-niece, Agnes Macdonald, or rather of one who is about her;—tell me of her governess, what is she like?’

‘Like!—like no one I could name. But she is a clever, accomplished woman; a German by birth, she says, though I sometimes doubt it, speaking three or four languages, and although, to own the truth, she and I have never been great friends, she has always kept herself in high favor with Margaret.’

‘How, and why, do you think?’

‘I hardly like to say it—yet I fear partly by a system of the most delicate and adroit flattery, that never betrays itself into coarse and palpable adulation; and partly because Margaret thinks it so great a privilege to have a lady of ancient lineage about Agnes.’

‘What does she call herself?’

‘The Baroness Von Bernheim, belonging to the family of Hesse something, and who, for a salary of two hundred a year, and “high consideration,” condescends to her situation. Her father, who had a string of titles, was colonel, she says, among the Black Brunswickers at Waterloo, and you know that enmity to Napoleon is always a key to Margaret’s sympathies.’

Lady Shafton nodded her head twice or thrice with a grave smile, as if confirmed in her opinion, whatever that might be; and drawing a memorandum-book from her pocket, she referred to it, continuing, — ‘Now tell me her probable age and personal appearance.’

‘She does not look above thirty, but if her father fell at Waterloo, she must be considerably more. She is of the medium height, tolerably well looking, yet

rather plebeian, nevertheless, if one dare say it of so grand a lady.'

'It is generally a powerful motive which induces a woman to add half a dozen years to her apparent age,' said Lady Shafton.

'My dearest Mary, what can you mean?'

'That my notes say — aged twenty-nine.'

'You terrify me, dear Mary, and fill my mind with vague suspicions!'

'One more question. Has she white, well-shaped hands, or anything remarkable about them?'

'Certainly a coarse hand; besides, she has partly lost the use of her left hand, from an accident when a child, which prevents her playing on any instrument, although she professes to understand music and teach it.'

'Conclusive,' exclaimed Lady Shafton, putting the note-book into her sister's hand. 'The description, though gathered piecemeal, is sufficiently authentic. Her hand was disabled a few years ago by a stab received in a quarrel and scuffle among her confederates, swindlers and gamblers. She is an arch-impostor, no more a Baroness than you or I; clever she may be, though hardly accomplished, for she passed some years of her life as waiting-maid, travelling with her mistress, and so, perhaps, improved her knowledge of languages. How could Margaret have been the dupe of such a person?'

'Easily,' replied Hester, 'for I never suspected such a revelation as this. And I do visit occasionally — do correspond with a few friends — do know something of the world beyond the gates of Lauder House.'

Not so Lady Macdonald, who lives only in the memory of her own past life, and in the future of her darling Agnes. She may readily have been imposed on by forged credentials.'

'Tell me what sort of a girl is Agnes?'

'Affectionate and tender-hearted, and, I fear, even more impulsive than we were in our girlish days, though awed into seeming coldness and apathy in her grandmother's presence. With excellent abilities, and a very fair share of beauty, she ought to realize all Margaret's hopes. But there is something dreadful in this woman having been her teacher — her associate for six months; and she is so attached to "her dear baroness," her "darling governess," as I hear her called sometimes. But, Mary, how came you to know such a history?'

'Briefly, thus: — Painters have strange experiences. A splendidly handsome, but most worthless young man has sat as model to my husband for more than one of his pictures. Willy wanted him again latterly, made inquiries at his residence, found a substitute in one of his some time associates, who, in pique at fancied neglect, babbled about him and his concerns, mentioning his sister, who was governess to a youthful heiress, and who had gained such influence with the grandmother, that she ruled the family, even hinting that there were plots weaving for him to marry the pupil. This idea is of course, too ridiculous; but there were so many circumstances that coincided with those of Margaret and her grand-daughter, that I decided on seeing you without delay. Our sister may never relent, and forgive my early fault; but it will ever be to me a sweet

consolation to have done her this service.' As Lady Shafton spoke, her voice trembled with emotion, but she proceeded : ' If, Hester, it will be painful to her to be obliged by me, spare her the humiliation ; only give her notice of the impostor. Let her question this worthless woman, and dismiss her. I have two dear daughters of my own, and I could not rest with the thought of the poor orphaned, though to me unknown, Agnes, being exposed to a vile woman's machinations. But here comes Edward,' she continued, struggling with her feelings ; ' though I wished to discuss this subject with you alone, he is quite cognizant of it.'

Edward Shafton had been the last twelve months at one of the Universities, or probably his father would not have sought beyond his own roof for a youthful model. Tall and finely formed, graceful with a natural grace, improved by good breeding, but which is in itself an expression of the mind ; with deep blue eyes, that half his friends thought black ; rich, soft, dark hair, and what one instinctively calls ' patrician ' features, he was really more of a pattern hero than I like by choice to portray.

' And this is Aunt Hester ! ' said he, in a rich, full voice, that had frankness and feeling in every tone ; and loosening his great coat, and throwing down his hat and stick as he spoke, ' Oh, how little changed since I sat on your knee, while you told me stories ! Won't you give me as hearty kisses now as you did years ago ? ' he continued, smiling and stooping to salute her ; and then, as both ladies were standing on the hearth-rug, he very quietly passed an arm round the waist of each with a gesture that had something of

protection amid its boyish wilfulness. And thus they chatted for a full ten minutes about the beauties of the Cathedral, and the false Baroness, and on some other topics, till the luncheon-dinner was served, Edward saying, incidentally, 'Mamma, dear, the express train we must go by leaves at six o'clock.'

'Hester, you will stay with us till the last,' exclaimed Lady Shafton entreatingly.

'Oh, certainly.' And so she did.

When Hester Ford returned to Lauder House, she saw the women-servants in tears, the men in strange confusion; and making her way to her sister's side, with wild, blind fear, found lady Macdonald in a stony agony.

There stood the matron in the middle of the room, with her cap fallen off, and her long grey hair streaming over her shoulders. Her eyes seemed glazed; her face was ashy pale; her lips moved, but uttered no sound; and when Hester rushed to her side, a gurgling noise alone betrayed her effort to speak, as she pointed with a stiffened finger to an open letter on the ground.

The writing was in the girlish hand of Agnes, and announced that she had fled.

CHAPTER IV.

NOTWITHSTANDING the general good management of our railways, there is always more or less helter-skelter when one starts from a station instead of a ter-

minus. It is no use being told, as the train approaches, that there is no hurry : the engine puffing off its steam when it stops as if every moment's delay were positive torture to its iron frame, says obstinately the contrary ; and right few passengers are lethargic enough to take their seats in a perfectly calm and leisurely manner. Lady Shafton and her son, however, being free from the traveller's trouble, luggage, were a little less hurried than the general throng which crowded the platform at D——, and took time to peep into two or three carriages before they made their selection. The one into which at last they stepped, would have been wholly unoccupied, save that a heap of travelling apparel, surmounted by a travelling cap, was cosily gathered in one of the corner seats, and suggested that probably a human being was entombed beneath that mountain of broadcloth. Hardly were they seated, when the remaining vacant places were appropriated by two ladies and a young man.

Off dashed the train, and soon away from the glare of the station's gas-lights, the twinkle of the little lamp in the roof of the carriage was duly estimated. Lady Shafton soon perceived that the good-natured face of a man about forty years of age peered from beneath the travelling cap ; but when she turned to the new comers, she remarked that the younger lady, who was evidently an object of great solicitude to her companions, kept her veil down, although its folds were not thick enough to conceal that she was stirred by some strong emotion. More than once her handkerchief was raised to her eyes, and Lady Shafton felt certain that she was weeping.

Nor was Edward Shafton unobservant of their companions: a truth which his mother, whose sympathy found a meaning in his every glance and movement, very soon perceived. Presently he took a card from his pocket, and writing a few words thereon with a pencil, handed it to her. She read as follows:—

‘There can be no doubt about *him*. Surely you recognise my father’s “Craven Knight” and “Lucifer expelled.” But who are *they*? Observe what double duty my neighbor makes her right hand do. And who can the young lady be, if not my cousin Agnes? Be calm, dearest little mamma, whatever you may suspect or we discover. He does not remember me the least, I am sure, and very likely he never saw you.’

There was a long look exchanged between mother and son, a look which was hardly less expressive to each other than words might have been; though none of their companions at all divined the tremor, the icy chill, and the fever flush which passed alternately through Lady Shafton’s frame, before she was able to recover her firmness and presence of mind. Yet a world of counsel, comfort, help, protection came to her on the wings of those three words, ‘dearest little mamma!’ What need she fear, what could she not dare, with her brave boy beside her?

At the first plausible opportunity Lady Shafton offered her vinaigrette to the young lady, a civility which was accepted, and led the way — one personage of the party being so very ready — to general conversation.

It has often been remarked that rogues, in the exercise of their vocation, generally exhibit more ingenuity,

and perform more arduous tasks, than might have been necessary in pursuing a straight-forward, honest career; in like manner the falsehoods and subterfuges of two of the travellers exhibited more invention in half an hour, than good quiet people might have needed in a lifetime. The pretended Baroness — for it is best at once to acknowledge that Lady Shafton's and her son's suspicions were correct — related how her young friend was in great distress of mind, being sent for to the death-bed of a near and dear relative; while the handsome, mustachioed, but not quite gentlemanly-looking young man, echoed her words, and added some insufferable slip-slop compliment about their young companion's tender heart and feeling nature.

It was at this moment the young girl raised her veil, perhaps inadvertently, perhaps because some spring of her nature compelled her to face, not cower beneath, the hail of falsehood that was showered around her. Lady Shafton saw and recognised the 'Ford eye,' as it flashed from the pale, suffering face of Agnes Macdonald, as if in resentment of her own weakness, that had brought upon her these insults; but Lady Shafton had too much at stake to be hasty or premature in the *éclaircissement*.

'Such journeys,' she observed, as if in credence of the woman's words, 'leave an indelible impression on the mind. Strange to say, this road is full of distressing associations to myself; for though the circumstances which occasioned them occurred before the railroad was formed, the name of more than one station to-night has brought back a host of recollections.'

The 'Baroness,' who no doubt expected a story savoring of funeral plumes and a death-bed summons, expressed herself anxious on the subject, and Lady Shafton continued : —

'Twenty years ago, a young girl, hardly older, I should think, than this young lady, fled from the neighborhood of D — ; fled from her home, from the protection of her nearest relative, to wed without the consent of one to whom she owed duty and gratitude.'

'And perhaps the marriage turned out very happily,' answered the other in a quick tone. 'Only to-day I heard an old maid regretting that she had not run off with her lover.'

'The marriage to which I allude,' continued Lady Shafton, 'cannot be said to have turned out ill, because the one fault of a life is something different from general depravity, and because the young lover was the soul of truth and honor, and because the love of both was genuine, young heart-love ; and yet I know that the long trials of poverty and disappointed ambition perilled this love, jeopardized it from time to time to the very brink of extinction, as a lamp dwindles for need of oil. Even in their latter happier days, when love has burned brightly, there has ever sat a weight of remorse at that girl's heart ; — remorse for kindness and protection ill requited, — remorse for her unmaidenly act, — remorse that sometimes took a phantom shape, and seemed to stand before her young daughters, and tell her she could be no guide and teacher to them. I knew that girl — I knew that wife intimately ; her flight took place in the Christmas week. You cannot wonder that the season and the place recalled it.'

The gentleman in the travelling cap had roused himself to listen to this story ; but they to whom it was addressed would have interrupted it, had they known how, without betraying themselves. At last the 'Baroness' observed, 'Poverty is a sad thing under any circumstances ; and perhaps if your friend had inherited a fortune, her troubles would have been fewer.'

'Nay, in one sense, her want of fortune was a blessing. It convinced her, at least, that her lover's vows were sincere, that it was herself he loved. Now, I hold that an heiress, if endowed with common sense, must distrust any lover who would urge her to a clandestine step, even to the secret encouragement of his addresses or an implied engagement.'

It was clear that the 'Baroness' had not bettered her position, especially as poor Agnes shook with emotion, and the vinaigrette was again in request. The two confederates spoke curtly and quickly a few words in what seemed a patois of French ; and Lady Shafton gathered that they were debating if they should quit the carriage at the next opportunity ; but finally, as they would reach London now in half an hour, it was agreed they should go on.

The last station passed, the last pause before the final one, and the train was again in rapid motion. The time for action was come, and, with a heart beating so fast and thick, she seemed to hear it, Lady Shafton turned to the silent gentleman in the corner and spoke thus : —

'If, Sir, you are made witness to a painful scene, pardon me ; but, I implore you, stand by the right.'

Then, turning quickly to the half-fainting girl, she passed an arm round her waist, and speaking rapidly, said :

‘Agnes Macdonald — dear girl, poor victim, be saved while you may. I am your aunt Mary — let me prove my identity — see the ring my sister Hester has worn for years ; you must know it : we exchanged rings to-day — and here is a letter in her hand-writing, received by me yesterday. Let me rescue you from these dreadful people, who are plotting your destruction. Nay, touch her not,’ — for the woman had seized her by the arm, and, in what very nearly approached a scuffle, had revealed the hideously maimed hand, — ‘touch her not. I know your history — even to the history of that hand. Be prudent, or I give you into the charge of the police.’

The pretended ‘Baroness’ quailed for a moment ; but she was too perfect in her part to be even now wholly at fault ; and so she poured forth a string of invectives on Lady Shafton, and of appeals to Agnes. Meanwhile the brother seized the hand of their dupe, and trying daringly to draw her towards him, uttered protestations that it would seem a pollution of love and truth to repeat. This was beyond the endurance of Edward, who, naturally athletic, seemed, from the excitement of the moment, to have acquired additional strength so that he untwisted the fingers which had clasped the girl’s wrist as if they belonged to a child, instead of to a man of five-and-twenty. The baffled fortune-hunter was in truth quite discomfited ; for his sister — probably disapproving of his harangue — tried to stop it more than once with a sharp ‘*tais-toi.*’

What wells of shame, remorse, humbled pride, and wounded affection were opened in the heart of poor Agnes, no tongue, no pen can tell ; but once, when, amid tears and sobs, she hesitated between the new true friend and the false but fondly loved teacher, a light broke upon her mind, which showed at least one proved deception.

‘ Oh, Baroness ! ’ she exclaimed, with bitter emotion, ‘ now that you are angry, how well you speak English ! ’

For the first time during the whole scene, the wretched woman blushed, while she bit her lip till the blood almost started.

Hitherto the gentleman in the corner had been a silent, though not unmoved listener ; now his voice was heard —

‘ It is a singular, a most remarkable coincidence,’ he observed, ‘ but I happen to have some knowledge of this lady’s family, and shall certainly consider myself justified in assisting her to rescue her niece from the control of strangers. I recommend you,’ he continued, addressing the guilty pair, ‘ to give up the young lady quietly. I have heard quite enough to comprehend your aim and purpose, and can, moreover, perceive that your youthful victim is at length herself undeceived. Be advised, and so avoid worse consequences.’

Meanwhile Agnes leaned back with closed eyes, and apparently half fainting. Lady Shafton whispered in her ear, ‘ You will go with me ; ’ and the response was a barely audible ‘ Yes.’

But the pretended Baroness heard it, and, desperate

with rage and foiled desires, made one last attempt to recover her advantage. Every phrase of persuasion she summoned to her aid, and, among other remarks, again alluded to Hester's words.

'Remember what I heard your aunt say only this morning, when I was passing through the drawing-room — that she repented having given up her lover to please Lady Macdonald — and will not you repent, too? — you who would have had the glory of raising a noble ——'

'False — false — false!' exclaimed Lady Shafton, 'you forget that we know you.'

But now the train was slackening speed, and in another minute the cry of 'Tickets — tickets!' broke with its plain reality upon the excitement of the scene. 'You had better go,' said the stranger gentleman, once more addressing the pair. And, with a fulsome attempt at leave-taking of Agnes, they were, after all, the first to leave the train.

'Pardon me,' said the stranger, addressing Lady Shafton, who was supporting the drooping Agnes as a mother would a suffering child, 'pardon the question, madam; but have you any one in attendance?'

'No; but we shall readily procure a conveyance.'

'I expect my carriage to be waiting — oblige me by using it. You may rely on my servants; whereas a hired driver might be followed and questioned.'

'How kind! how thoughtful!' said Lady Shafton. 'Let me know to whom we are indebted.'

'My name is ——. I will give you my card, or do myself the pleasure of calling to inquire after you in a day or two. James,' he continued, addressing

his coachman in a low voice — for the carriage was quickly found — ‘James, I shall walk home; but you will drive these friends of mine to Harley street, and drive fast. Take care you are not followed, and answer no questions that may be asked you.’

Let me draw a veil over the confession of poor Agnes, as she sobbed out the history of her fault to Lady Shafton. Almost as ignorant of the world as a cloistered nun can be, and yet possessed of warm affections, and an imaginative romantic nature, the artful governess had worked on this temperament, partly by her conversation, and partly by the books she had placed before her. She had painted in flaming colors the pleasures of society and of the gay world; and had taken every occasion of contrasting them with the dull life at Lauder House, and the severe discipline established by Lady Macdonald. Then, choosing her opportunity, the handsome brother — no one having an idea of the relationship — had been introduced, with Lady Macdonald’s concurrence, as a teacher of the guitar; but only to Agnes was it told that he was a nobleman in disguise; who, for love of her, had devised this subterfuge. The innocent credulity of youth never doubted; she was led astray by her she had been instructed to trust and obey; and, finally, by a plot within a plot, she was induced to write — merely as a rough copy, she was told — a letter to Lady Macdonald, declaring her attachment and intentions, only to be used in case of necessity. Then came the artfully-planned, but seemingly accidental, opportunity; and the moment of trust so cruelly betrayed!

CHAPTER V.

WE left Hester Ford in the first moment of her astonishment and distress ; and it was long before she could rouse Lady Macdonald from the dull agony in which she found her, to a free burst of tears. Yet it came at last, and brought something of relief. Never had Hester seen her haughty sister so moved ; and perhaps, in her heart, she had not believed her capable of such suffering as she witnessed. The flight of Agnes and her governess had only just been discovered ; no steps to pursue them had yet been taken ; and it was clear that action and direction remained for Hester. For the first time in her life, the proud, self-sustained Lady Macdonald, prostrated by her anguish, appealed and yielded to her younger sister.

No doubt Hester felt somewhat calmer and more hopeful than she might otherwise have done, from having a clue, vague as it was, to the fugitives ; and moreover, she had a strange dim presentiment that her sister Mary would prove all-powerful to avert the dreaded calamity of a disgraceful marriage — that event which had been spoken of only a few hours before as ‘ too ridiculous.’ Her first thought was of the electric telegraph, but her watch told her it was too late ; she had loitered at D——, making some purchases, and the express train would be due in London before a message to stop the fugitives could be forwarded. Finally, she decided on sending the butler — a trusty servant — by special train to London, with a letter to Lady Shafton, urging her to track the poor lost child. Messen-

gers were sent also in other directions, and Lady Macdonald's lawyer summoned; and now the night was advancing.

What a night it was! Lady Macdonald refused even to seek sleep, and alternately paced the room, wringing her hands, as she by turns reproached Agnes and blamed herself; or fell, exhausted by grief, into her chair. All Hester's energies were taxed in her office of consoler, or she might have wept even more bitterly than she did for the fate and conduct of her young relative. The servants had been ordered to rest, all but a man who drowsed by the hall fire; and now it must have been two o'clock in the morning. Everything was still out of doors; though once, when Hester opened a shutter to look at the night, she saw that fresh snow was falling in large feathery flakes. Suddenly there was a noise of wheels, as of some light conveyance, so near that the lodge-gates must have been passed, and in another minute a loud peal at the bell.

The sleepy servant roused himself to unbar the door, and the sisters listened, mute and almost breathless.

'Let me see Miss Ford instantly,' said the stranger. 'I am the bearer of good news.' And Hester recognised the voice of Edward Shafton! She sprang to his side; six words apprised her that Agnes was saved; she led him to Lady Macdonald — told the happy truth in broken ejaculations — and there, with the snow-flakes dripping from his garments, but looking unwearyed by travel, the spirit of the glad tidings lighting up his handsome countenance, stood the son of the despised sister, for the first time beneath that roof.

He told his story simply and distinctly, yet without claiming for his mother the merit which Lady Macdonald's heart loudly proclaimed was her due.

'Knowing but too well,' he continued, 'that every hour's delay must be a year of suffering to Lady Macdonald, and as I was a witness to the whole transaction, both my father and mother at once decided that I should bring the intelligence by a special train. Be assured, dear madam, that your grand-daughter is safe, save that her young heart seems almost broken by remorse for the part she has played. But my mother and sisters are the fondest of nurses — if I could only hope to mediate ——'

'Yes, yes, she must come back,' interrupted Lady Macdonald. 'I will be gentle with her — tender. I will not reproach. Oh, Agnes, I never knew till now how dear you were!' And again, subdued by her feelings, she leaned her head on the table, and wept bitterly.

All this time Edward had been standing, with a small table and two wax candles — which feebly lighted the large room — between him and Lady Macdonald; but now it was that Hester offered to take his hat from his hand, and motioned him to be seated. Yet, though he acknowledged, he did not accept the courtesy. Lady Macdonald saw the gesture of each, and understood what was passing in their minds.

She calmed herself for a moment, rose from her seat, and laying her hand on Edward's arm, looked at him mournfully.

'Young man,' she exclaimed, 'are you so hard upon me? Can you only think of my past unkindness, and

so deem yourself an unwelcome guest? Do you not know what I owe your mother? — ah, your face is like hers — and I feel poor Mary will forgive me yet. Everything is so different from what I thought — you are a gentleman — I could have been proud of you for my own son.' Her voice was choked with fresh-coming tears — her frame trembled — and Edward, in another minute, found himself supporting the haughty lady who had been to him for years the imagined type of pride and coldness — found himself soothing and solacing her, and finally seated by her side, his hand clasped in hers. That gesture, which had reminded her that he felt himself the son of the outcast, had probed her to the quick.

Suddenly, a new paroxysm of grief seized Lady Macdonald. Hitherto, her absorbing sorrow had seemed only to control the Present; now she perceived how its dark shadow stretched far into the Future.

'My poor Agnes!' she exclaimed. 'Lost, unhappy child! What man — such as I would give you to — will now take you for his wife, with the dark stain of an attempted elopement upon you?'

'Think not of this,' said Hester soothingly; 'the most tangled threads of life weave themselves free at last. Let us for the present only rejoice that the poor child has escaped from the worst consequences of so deep a plot.'

'But I cannot help thinking of the future,' resumed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of bitterness, and with increasing emphasis. 'Since my son's death, the one dream, the one hope of my life has been to see Agnes

suitably wed — to know that my husband's name and honors would be revered by his descendants — to believe that our line would yet show great men and virtuous women;—and now — oh, may God forgive me for clinging thus to the creature He gave me, and to the hopes of this world!’ And again, as if rent by anguish, she sank her head upon her hands.

Edward Shafton was deeply moved. Truly the events of the last few hours had taught him lessons of life which he might have been long in learning, and by a better teaching, than men — licensed, it would seem, rather to learn evil than good — often know. He spoke from his heart when he said —

‘Think not men are so hard and unforgiving. I can fancy a man of purest life, feeling pity and sympathy for such a fault, committed at such an age. Love, too, is ever generous and self-devoting. I have witnessed her sufferings—I am certain of her remorse — and I have seen the specious wretches who betrayed her, and know that her innocence was no match for their villany.’

‘You — you — but no other man in the world!’ exclaimed Lady Macdonald, wringing her hands: and still, at intervals, she repeated, ‘You — you — but no other!’

CHAPTER VI.

THOROUGH gossips — those chattering magpies of society, who are perpetually talking about persons, not

things — it is to be feared abound more or less in every circle; but, perhaps, it is part of the beautiful system of compensation which prevails in the world, that such people are never content with the morsel of truth simply as they receive it. They are for ever adding to, and taking from a fact; guessing and conjecturing; building up mighty fabrics on false foundations, and propping these falling edifices with new inventions, until, in the hurly-burly, the original particle of truth often glides out of sight. Thus was it — and in many respects most fortunately so — with the saddest episode in the life of Agnes.

The attempted elopement coinciding with the reconciliation of the estranged sisters, the evil was merged in the good by the voice of rumor. After two or three preposterous versions had had their day, the tale quietly settled down that Agnes Macdonald, impelled by a generous and romantic feeling, had so strongly urged her grand-mother to receive Lady Shafton, that high words had ensued, and that she had thereupon sought protection from her aunt. Indeed, one of the gossips of D——, (a male gossip, too), speaks on the subject still with quite positive knowledge.

‘I will tell you how I know it,’ he says frequently to his intimates. ‘I met Mr. Peters, the butler, not three days after it happened, and I asked him boldly if it were true that he was sent after Miss Macdonald to London, and he said, “Why, not exactly. I was sent with a letter to Lady Shafton. Bless you, first of all we thought Miss Agnes had run away to get married, but that wasn’t it; for when I got up to the London house, there were the whole family retired to roost as

if nothing had happened. Only my knocking woke them, and her leddyship — that's the new-made Lady Shafton — promised I should see Miss Agnes, and, after a little while, brought her down in a morning-wrapper to the parlor, and then she told me how she had sent her son to Lauder House, to assure Lady Macdonald that her grand-daughter was safe, and to explain how it happened that she had taken charge of Miss Agnes all the way from D——." Now, putting this and that together,' continues the gossip, 'I can make out the whole thing. There was the meeting in the morning at the inn; Lady Shafton would *not* go to Lauder House to plead her own cause; the little niece, impatient to see her, and smarting under the quarrel with her grandmother, overtook her aunt just as the express train was starting; — this was how it happened. As for the foreign governess — Peters says she went out with Miss Macdonald that evening — I don't clearly know about her; but it was a dull life that she had of it, and I dare say she wanted to get back to her own people.'

Fortunate Agnes, to be left to the fabrications of the gossips — but, oh, more fortunate to have your secret faithfully kept by them who knew it!

The meeting of Agnes and her grandmother, and the return of Lady Shafton, invited, honored, welcomed, to the roof from which she had fled twenty years before, have something too sacred to be briefly and abruptly described; better, far better, leave them to be imagined by readers who may have sympathized with the characters and circumstances of the sisters.

Before the Christmas week had passed, not only was Lady Shafton her sister's guest, but her husband and her children were gathered round that venerable lady with respectful affection. Lady Macdonald's feelings were very strange. She was not happy, although new sources of happiness were opened to her. The wound of her recent grief was still fresh; but with that grief had come knowledge. Had some such grief come to her thirty years before, she would have been through the prime of her years a better and a nobler woman. Her pride at last had bent — she had learnt she was fallible; for even her prejudices told her, that had her system been perfect, 'a Macdonald — and by her mother's side a Percy,' as she loved to consider Agnes, — could not have forgotten her dignity, and proved a second 'Black Sheep' in the family.

There was to be no new governess for Agnes; Lady Macdonald decided to take a house in town — to have finishing-masters for her grand-daughter — to relinquish, at nearly sixty years of age, her life of seclusion, and once again to enter into society.

'What are you going to do with my pet, Edward?' she said one day to her sister. Months had now passed, and almost daily intercourse had removed all embarrassment from their conversation.

'Ah,' replied Lady Shafton, 'I wish I could positively answer. He is going back to college for a few months, but we must decide for him very soon.'

'Would he like the army?'

'Only too well, as I have reason to know; but we have little interest and less money to promote him there.'

‘Money,’ said Lady Macdonald, after a short pause, ‘money shall not be wanting; in short, I have taken a fancy to Edward, and you must leave him in my hands. I have interest, if I choose to use it; and so to-morrow I will write to the Commander-in-Chief — he will not refuse me.’

And so on the morrow she did. No one saw her letter, which, however, was short and business-like; but she inclosed two or three time-stained documents, the paper yellowed, the ink browned with age, and at the creases holding together but by fibres. These evidences of her husband’s fame had been worn to shreds by frequent opening; for they had been to Lady Macdonald as dear and sacred as are the relics of a saint to a superstitious devotee.

Her confidence was not misplaced. The Commander-in-Chief declared that ‘a request from the widow of Sir Andrew Macdonald was a command,’ and naming three regiments, requested her to choose between them.

‘Dearest Margaret,’ exclaimed Lady Shafton, when the subject was under discussion, and perceiving which way her sister inclined, ‘these brilliant prospects for Edward terrify me in one respect. The officers of the —th are, as every one knows, noblemen or men of fortune — how can he with small means associate with them on equal terms?’

‘I have thought of all this,’ said Lady Macdonald, promptly; ‘you forgot that *I* have undertaken to provide for him. My dear Mary, I have been saving half my income for twenty years, and am richer than you suspect; and as for Agnes, her mother’s fortune se-

cured to her, has already doubled by lying untouched. Edward is a gentleman every inch; and the Shaftons are one of the oldest families in England. I wonder, Mary, you never told me so.'

'I never knew it,' said Lady Shafton, smiling; 'my husband cares only for his art, and I believe, if the truth were to be told, would rather be descended from Michael Angelo's color-grinder than from William the Conqueror.'

'How extraordinary!' exclaimed Lady Macdonald, 'and in such a man, with "patrician" stamped in every movement.

'The stamp of genius, darling sister,' exclaimed Lady Shafton, enraptured at this appreciation of her beloved husband at last.

'Nonsense; directly my attention was drawn to the subject I found out all about the family. There was a Sir Hugh Shafton distinguished in the wars of the Roses, and a descendant of his intermarried with the Howards. Some of the oldest families in England have fallen into similar decay.'

Later that day Lady Macdonald observed,

'If Agnes were to marry a gentleman wanting fixed position, I could easily obtain the restoration of the baronetcy extinct by the failure of male heirs. The Government would not refuse me.'

Ah! it was easy to see in what direction her thoughts were roaming. Edward's words on the night he came to Lauder House, as the herald of peace and reconciliation, had never left her memory, — that declaration of pity and sympathy for Agnes, which had drawn from her the exclamation, 'You — you, but no other!' Her

own words seemed to haunt her, and point to but one result. Nor was there in this the inconsistency which at first there seems. Pride, her ruling passion, was still her ally ; it taught her that Agnes could never wed without a confession of her early fault ; and yet, how was the revelation to be endured ? Poor Agnes ! No girl or woman ever commits your fault without having some penalty to pay !

Perhaps, too, the consideration in which Lady Macdonald perceived Sir William Shafton and his family were held had its weight ; for at his house she met the bearers of ancient names who paid their homage to genius, and moved, without a dream of condescension, among the new nobility — the aristocracy of active intellect — which is ruling the world. Though her mind had rusted by torpor, Lady Macdonald was far too clever not to recognise the fact, that while she had secluded herself to rear two generations, the world had rolled on to a brighter, purer atmosphere, than was known when she left it. Military Glory was well and right when duly earned, and it had made way for the Victories of Peace ; but the world had other glories also now. Her head whirled sometimes when she thought of these things, — yet she did not turn away from the contemplation.

But what of the persons chiefly concerned ? very naturally asks the reader — what of Edward Shafton and Agnes Macdonald themselves ? Why, that there was much in their age, relationship, which though distant, was relationship still, — and the peculiar circumstances of their position, which drew them insensibly nearly, dearly, and intimately together ; and that every

one about them was far too prudent to mar the project which everybody wished fulfilled, by appearing to know anything about it. Yet there was a marriage in the family, and that the first year of Lady Macdonald's residence in London.

The stranger of the railway-carriage fulfilled his promise of calling in Harley-street, and sent in his card, 'Mr. Gerald Wentmore.' He was a rich man now, and on the eve of being returned member for a northern county — on Lady Macdonald's side of politics too. Need we tell of the second wooing of her who had refused, but truly loved him? Enough that, though Hester listened to the story of his faith, kept unchanged through years, — faith to a sentiment, a remembrance, he did not tell her of the words repeated by the pretended Baroness, and which fanned once more into a flame the smouldering embers of hope. Very likely she has owned to him the truth which they conveyed; but lovers' *tête-à-têtes* are sacred, even though the lovers be no longer young.

Nothing positive is known of the 'Baroness' and her brother; but a pair, singularly like them from description, have been recently convicted as swindlers.

And now for our further facts we are indebted to the *Morning Post*. Among the presentations at her Majesty's last drawing-room, we read, 'Mrs. Gerald Wentmore, on her marriage, by her sister, Lady Macdonald,' and 'Miss Macdonald, by her aunt, Lady Shaf-ton.' And lower down, among the *on dits*, there was this paragraph: —

'It is confidently reported that a marriage is on the *tapis* between the beautiful and accomplished Miss

Macdonald, grand-daughter of the late Sir Andrew Macdonald, Bart., K. C. B., &c. &c., and the gallant Captain Shafton, of the ——th Dragoons, only son of our English Correggio, Sir William Shafton.’

HAUNTED HOUSES.

'A jolly place,' said he, 'in times of old !
But something ails it now : the place is curst.'

WORDSWORTH.

THERE is a certain class of literature, that must now be very near its death-struggle. It has passed through the stages when hot-pressed paper, once devoted to its use, lined the bodies of trunks and assisted the cheesemonger. In those days it still claimed the semi-respect which belongs to fallen greatness ; but now the thick creamy paper rejects it altogether, and it strives for a protracted existence only on the poor-looking, but mischievous sheets that circulate among the ignorant, the idle, and the vicious. It is acquainted with low taverns and miserable dwellings ; and after polluting the minds of its readers to the best of its ability, wraps up some nauseous preparation of tobacco, preparatory to being trampled in the kennel. This is a more ignoble fate than winding round wholesome butter, or lining a strong leathern trunk.

The very themes which associate themselves in our minds with this repudiated 'Minerva Press' School of writing belong, when treated by a master-hand, to the highest ranks of literature. Romantic fiction is sometimes the right hand of philosophy, and teaches deeper

truths than those which dwell on the historian's page ; and many things which, for want of a more exact term, we call Superstition, are intimately interwoven with much that is precious in religion, in morals, and in poetry. When Genius touches a fragment of Superstition, the dross all falls away, leaving the pure indestructible ore to be handled and fashioned to a shape of beauty. This did Shakspeare a hundred times ; and Coleridge in his ' Ancient Mariner ; ' Scott in his ' Lady of Avenel ; ' and — not to prolong an infinite string of quotations — poor Hood, in his beautiful poem, ' The Haunted House.'

The Superstition of ' Haunted Houses,' is as ' old as the hills,' or if not quite so venerable, seems to have originated as soon as houses were built. But the superstition especially prolonged to the feudal times, when every baronial dwelling had its tale to be told of strife and bloodshed ; when might, not right, gained the day ; when written chronicles were few, and the story literally repeated at first, gained something from the imagination of each successive narrator, till, in a few generations, facts became so warped and disfigured, so added to and subtracted from, that the very actors in the life-dramas recorded would not have recognised the scenes and events described, could they indeed have risen from their tombs and *haunted* the story-tellers ! Somehow or other, the legend becomes vulgarized in the light of the nineteenth century : instead of a beautiful lady, attired in flowing white draperies, with shining dark hair, (not out of curl from the dews of night, or contact with her earthy resting-place,) who at the dead of night paced the

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long corridors of the ' Haunted House ' with noiseless tread, ever resting at one spot, ever pointing to one panel, (where of course there was hidden the proof of some ' rightful heir's ' claims,) ever vanishing at crow-of-cock, yet ever returning ; — instead of this, the *more* modern version is that of an invisible sprite, whose loftiest mission is to ring the bells and break the china — in this last particular generously taking upon himself the misdeeds of the cat or the kitchen-maid.

Surely, however, in this marked degeneracy of the latter-day ghosts, we can trace the symptoms of their decaying influence.

But let us dwell for a moment on the real, old-fashioned, orthodox Haunted House, and conjure up to the mind's eye at least its material features. It is a gloomy, desolate looking pile, deserted by the owner, going to wreck and ruin from neglect. The rusty gate creaks on the one hinge by which it hangs ; the gravel path is green with moss and weeds ; a few hardy garden flowers grow wild, when not quite choked by the deadly embrace of the beth-bind ; dark, thick leaved trees spread forth their straggling branches, which seem in the twilight like ready palls for the confined dead ; the fish-pond is but a stagnant pool, too fetid even for the water-lilies to live, — only long reedy grass can draw nourishment from its pollution ; the statue which graced the entrance hall are noseless, fingerless, or headless ; the banisters are broken ; the rats have gnawed away the wainscot ; the stairs are fascinatingly dangerous to tread ; the mildewed ' arras ' flaps with every breeze ; the windows are broken, and bats and owls flit in and out ; dust and damp are the varnish to everything,

and cobwebs the appropriate drapery ; there is a stain on the oaken floor, impervious to scouring drops, and defiant of patent scrubbing-brushes ; — and — and the visitor is invited to listen to the story of the ‘ White Lady,’ or the ‘ Warrior Knight,’ who, on account of their own unrepented sins, are permitted to frighten and torment their descendants, or stranger guests. But these, whatever their private and individual failings, never did the ghosts any harm, either in the body or the spirit ; and it must be allowed that the *revenants* are sadly deficient in a sense of justice and consideration for nervous people. The French word, literally ‘ come-back,’ is more expressive than our own.

But there are other sorts of Haunted Houses than those which have found favor with ballad-mongers and story-tellers. Houses where neither dust nor damp prevails ; where cobwebs are carefully brushed away ; and where the busy stir of human life proclaims these dwellings to be lawfully occupied. Houses, bright-faced to meet the open sunshine, either in the crowded city, or by the breezy downs ; houses which own no legend of the midnight hour, and yet are haunted by spirits potent for good and evil.

See that modest looking dwelling ; it is one of a row all built by the same rule and measure, and yet it has a distinct character of its own. The door-steps are a thought whiter than those of its neighbors, and it may be the windows are somewhat brighter. Yet little rosy cheeks, and shining golden curls, often lean against the glass, especially when he is expected who ever returns from the labors of the day with loving smiles and cheerful words. A young matron plies her needle

a little apart from those eager watchers, yet looks from time to time over their heads, or between the net-work of their wreathed arms; the 'neat-handed' serving maid — there is but one — listens also for the well-known step, and knows it the signal for tea to be ready. The children have pets, feathered and four-footed, which are tamed to intelligence; and an old superannuated dog, that once a day recovers its sprightliness to welcome the master. The well-conditioned cat too, purrs musically at his feet, and rubs her sleek head against his boot. It is what thousands would call an humble home — but a lofty spirit haunts the place — the holy and beautiful spirit of Love! No living thing within its precincts trembles at harsh words or frowning looks — a band of invisible fairies, evoked by their ruler, circle round the walls, and exorcise Fear, and Fear's attendant vices from Love's happy dominions.

Only the next door — but what a difference! — the very atmosphere seems changed as you enter. It is the house of a tyrant — one of that miserable class who love power in its meanest shape. He has chased Power as a savage chases and woos a mistress, and has found it at last in his money-bags. Yet he is a miser — and spends not to bless or enjoy. What evil spirits haunt the house! Little yellow imps sit perched upon a large tin box, that holds hard-hearted bonds and shrivelled leases, and they grin and jabber with demoniac glee when the winter wind blows bitter cold, and the snow-flakes fall, and the gaunt and famished wanderer begs her way to the workhouse gate. Terror, too, like a grim skeleton, stalks up and down, making every

living thing to tremble ; and in league with this master-spirit there have been summoned a troop of demon dwarfs — sharp cunning, deceit, meanness — which always come where Fear abides to weave their tangled nets. Alas ! they seem to be but ready servants to the trembling coward whom tyranny has crushed to their companionship ; and yet as they weave and weave, and work and work, the shuttle flies further, and further till the web of evil has grown a mighty one, and makes of him who called it into being a miserable captive for life !

Let us enter now that stylish-looking mansion. The rooms are lofty, and maintain an air of elegance. The walls are used to echo song, and jest, and hollow laughter ; the wide mirrors to reflect a throng of stranger faces ; and yet the house is haunted by an ugly sprite, that sits at the board when costly viands are displayed, and bright wines poured. The sprite wears a broad and comely mask over its own bloated, ill-favored countenance, but the mask is always slipping aside, and everybody sees that it is Ostentation, not Hospitality, which does the honors. Ostentation makes every place disagreeable that he inhabits ; for his law is to seem, and not to be. Once firmly established, seldom anything but poverty can drive him away — and poverty often comes at last, introduced by the go-between Extravagance.

Very often large buildings, where hundreds of human beings congregate, and toil from early dawn to long past sun-set, are only haunted houses. Haunted by the cruel spirit of Avarice, that for its own earthly gain sacrifices souls and bodies. It bows down young

children to disease and death ; it robs youth of its bloom, and the just inheritance of hope and fruition ; it degrades man to a worse condition than that of the brutes, for it forces his higher, but unused powers, to dwindle to incapacity, and thus peoples the land with ignorance and vice, with the overthrowers of order and the doers of evil, making these of the very souls that might have expanded to noble offices.

Avarice often takes more fair sounding names than its own, and there are certainly degrees in its malignity ; but too seldom it is banished altogether from the ' mill ' and the mart, from the warehouse and the counter !

We must breathe more freely ; come away to beneath a different roof, where mind is working for the good of humanity. There are many such, — the school-house, — the lecture hall, — the picture-gallery, — the printing office, — and the quiet home in which the Thinker broods, and whence he sends the spiritual sheet, or the eloquent canvass, or calls to being whatever the material instrument he chooses for his purpose. The Spirit of Wisdom ' haunts ' the place to make it holy, and stretches its fair white wings around to keep off evil influences. Justice, and Truth, and Charity, stand hand in hand ; and Love, the love of *all* humanity, nestles there, for True Wisdom is not to be separated from the Virtues.

Every house is a ' Haunted House,' if we think of it in this fashion ; and fancy can almost give a corporeal shape to each invisible presence. An evil spirit is only to be exorcised by its opposite ; but though selfishness, ill-temper, and avarice, are potent despots,

clinging with tight hold to the thrones they have usurped, spreading misery like a pestilence, and withering goodness and happiness wherever they abide, Wisdom and Love are yet mightier powers, with an infinite train of fairy followers, ever ready to vanquish the evil spirits, ever ready to sit by our hearths, if we will but invite them with hearty good-will !

THE HARTSDALE VINDICATOR, OR MODERN INNOVATIONS.

‘WELL, my dear Sir, have you heard the news?’ said Major Stukely, a retired officer in an English country town, to a friend who had only just returned home after an absence of some weeks.

‘Not a word have I heard that deserves to be called news,’ replied he; ‘what is going on, pray?’

‘Why, a railway is to pass through the town; that is all.’

‘A railway! nonsense,’ cried the other; ‘we are very well as we are. Everything goes on very nicely at present. The stage-coach that comes to the town daily, is sufficient for all the traffic; and to break in upon this quiet rural scene with one of their horrid snorting locomotives, would be a downright sin.’

‘Gentlemen, you will all come to my way of thinking at last,’ interposed Mr. Elliot, the medical practitioner of the place, as he joined the group. ‘We must have a paper to protect our interests. What with the new poor-laws, and fifty other new-fangled things, we shall go completely to the wall if we do not assert our opinions, and have our say against such innovations. Ah, if old Sir George had been living, he would have taken care to preserve such a fine hunting county as

this from these abominable changes. For my own part, I should not wonder if, in twenty years, there is not a fox to be found. As for our member, the present Sir George, he is not a bit of a sportsman; in fact, I look upon him as a traitor, and think, when we do establish a paper, he ought to be shown up. Why, he has actually given permission for the railway to pass right through his park.'

'But he stipulated for a bridge over it, and really some persons think his property is in no way injured,' interrupted one who, though speaking in a gentle voice, ventured to have an opinion of her own on two or three subjects. 'And as for the foxes,' she continued, 'if the end and aim of hunting be their extirpation, as we must suppose, the result of all these changes which you anticipate will be a very happy one.'

'Ah, Miss Somers,' said Mr. Elliot, 'you have not led a country life, or you would not speak in that way.'

'Nay, ever since I left school, for seven years Hartsdale has been my home,' she replied; 'yet I think now, as I thought long ago, that the chase is an occupation only fit for savages, and that the lover of it must of necessity be devoid of humanity and intellectual cultivation. To be sure I feel so great a disgust towards sportsmen, that I have as little compassion for them as they bestow on the brutes, and never can grieve when the loss of life or limb brings them their just deserts. However, as you say, had I lived all my life in the country, and been taken when a little girl to see the hounds throw off, and been taught by my brothers that it was a fine thing to maim poor birds, and to torture a timid hare, perhaps I might have

thought differently. But I am thankful to Providence, that, as it is, I know how to call some things by their right names.'

Louisa Somers warmed as she spoke, for she felt keenly on the subjects then under discussion. And it is a happy thing for the improvement of the world, that young minds are for ever springing up, untrammelled by old habits or deep-rooted prejudices, but with strong energies and fresh hearts, ready to open out new and better paths.

'I was saying,' proceeded Mr. Elliot, who was an excellent man, though a little wrong-headed on some points — 'I was saying that, since Sir George has declared himself on the side of these ridiculous and mischievous innovators, I have no hope for Hartsdale but in the firmness and consistency of its inhabitants; and I think the idea of a monthly newspaper an admirable one. Every considerable body requires its organ. We have been too long without one, and have consequently become the prey of interlopers and speculators of all sorts.'

The somewhat pompous major, who had carried into private life some of the prejudices of his military career, and was a hater of all new plans and projects, perfectly agreed with the doctor, and favored him with many suggestions thought by both to be very admirable.

The conversation to which I have alluded took place on the occasion of a tea-party at the house of the Misses Gunning, two ancient ladies, who, though they bore the traces of having been dowered in their youth with beauty not inferior to that of their famous namesakes,

had passed their lives in a calm seclusion the very opposite to the career of the celebrated dames. Miss Elizabeth, the younger, had been betrothed forty years ago to a handsome soldier cousin, who fell in the peninsular war. The shock to her mind, and the grief that followed his death, brought on a tedious illness, and during many years her sister Susan devoted herself to the sufferer with that self-devotion, patience, and affection, which belong to the heroism of private life. Tenderly attached to each other, the minds of both were sobered down from youth's giddiness by that which had been a mutual grief; and even when Time, the healer, had worked its cure, they looked on the world with different eyes, different wishes, different expectations, from those of their untroubled days. They determined to live for each other only, and, several years before this little story opens, they chose Laurel Cottage for their residence.

If I am too minute in sketching the incidents which had moulded such simple characters as theirs, the reader will bear with it, because it is only by remembering the quiet course of their latter years, and the tone of feeling—so averse to change—which prevailed in the little town, that he can understand the perplexities which came upon its inhabitants. A word must be said about Hartsdale itself. Tradition attributes the name to some romantic incident of a hart escaping thither from the hunters, one of whom lost his life in attempting to follow it down a ravine. The spot is shown by the learned to the curious to this day. Situated in a beautiful valley of one of the midland counties of England, and distant about twelve miles

from a cathedral city, Hartsdale, though it boasts a market once a week, and enumerates other privileges which help to constitute a town instead of a village, is a place to which change and improvements for some time travelled but slowly ; and this, although in the

- ' old times ' of fiery red, bright blue, and blinding yellow stage-coaches, no fewer than ten of these machines passed down the High Street in the course of the day. But, alas ! they passed, or seldom indeed stopped to cast upon the barrenness one particle of news. Yet stay ! The ' Telegraph,' moving with a four-horse power at the rate of eight miles an hour, did in those golden days change horses at the White Hart Inn, and consequently and naturally the Telegraph was voted by the Hartsdalian to be the safest, quickest, finest, and every way most desirable vehicle on the road. From the driver or passengers of the Telegraph a morsel of news sometimes fell, like a crumb to the hungry ; but the mail even dropped the letter-bag without stopping ! Nevertheless, I have a firm conviction that the circumstance of the town lying in a road through which ten coaches per day, to different parts of the kingdom, must pass, had been a pride, a pleasure, and an attraction, not to be estimated by those who, from their proximity to populous places, have rather an aversion than otherwise to the sound of wheels.

But a new era was at hand ; within the last two years the railways had intruded on Hartsdale : those moral arteries which, traversing the kingdom from end to end, carrying intelligence of all sorts to and from its mighty heart, and so removing prejudices, jealousies, and enmities, are destined to prove among

those triumphs of science which bless and regenerate mankind. But the little community, not clear-sighted or long-sighted enough to perceive all these advantages, and full of local pride and present interests, saw nothing but the petty inconveniences and personal injuries attendant on the changes of the time. One by one the stage-coaches dropped away, just in proportion as the new lines in the neighboring counties were thrown open. No longer could the schoolmistress dismiss her little flock without reference to clock or sun-dial, knowing full well that when the horn of the 'Defiance' fast coach was sounded, it must be one o'clock. No longer could the grocer's wife regulate her spouse's dinner-hour by the appearance of 'Lightning' on the brow of the hill. The proud Defiance lay humbled to the dust, wheelless and degraded, in a coach-maker's yard, preparatory to being chopped up for firewood; and Lightning was extinct, or departed no one knew whither. At last a pert new-stuccoed station was erected within three miles of the town, and the encroaching iron enemy thus brought as it were to their very door. Even the Telegraph — their own dear Telegraph — that had been true to them through all, showed symptoms of desertion. Yet what could it do, poor thing? It died very hard. Day after day it drove through the town without a single passenger; then the four horses were reduced to two; and, finally, so convinced were the Hartsdilians that it had 'done all which it became a coach to do' in the maintenance of its existence and its dignity — so clearly did they perceive that it was vanquished only by the stern power of a resistless foe — that though tears were

shed at the announcement that it too had found its 'occupation gone,' pity was bestowed upon the proprietor and coachman, instead of the torrent of reproach which had been showered on the heads of the earlier deserters.

And now the blow had fallen — Hartsdale was without a coach! And it must be acknowledged that several inconveniences were the result. Not only did the Misses Gunning feel lonely and desolate, now that they could no longer start to their window half a dozen times a day to behold a coach load of dusty or mud-bespattered travellers, but whenever they themselves made an excursion of a few miles — it scarcely mattered in which direction — a calamity fell on them, to which custom brought no reconciling feelings. Their elderly man-servant Peter, in addition to his care of the garden, was groom, to, and driver of, a stout horse, to which was ordinarily attached a low phaeton. The body of the carriage only held the two ladies conveniently — though there were many persons who thought there was abundant room for a third — but the seat beside the driver was one surely open for lawful competition. Now that there were no coaches to take them short stages, what could people possessing neither carriages nor horses do but — beg the use of them from their more fortunate neighbors? Sometimes — if the weather were doubtful there was the readier plea — there came a courteous message at breakfast-time to ask, 'If the Misses Gunning were going into C—— that day, would they be so very kind as to give Mr. So-and-so a seat beside Peter? or if they were not going to use the phaeton any day that

week, he would consider it a particular obligation if they would lend it to him. Mrs. So-and-so had heard that their darling Eleanor at school seven miles off, had fallen down and hurt her wrist, and she was so anxious to see her — cross roads — no conveyance — a thousand apologies,' &c. &c.

Now, the dear old ladies had the kindest hearts in the world — hearts so kind that their humanity extended to the brutes; and they plainly perceived that the position of their horse Tartar was ceasing to be the enviable one it had long been considered. A council was held, to which Peter was called; and he, judging, as he said, by the manner in which Tartar threw back his ears, either when he started with an unusual load or took up a stray pedestrian on the way, was of opinion that the horse could not stand it. Alas! alas! many a time the ladies deprived themselves of their accustomed ride to oblige an acquaintance, stipulating always, however, that Peter should drive, on which occasions he took care that Tartar should neither go too far nor too fast.

And now another disturbance was coming, like an avalanche, upon Hartsdale. The railway had brought so many strangers to the spot, that its 'capability' and 'resources' were perceived and acknowledged. It was thought a pity that the clear and rapid stream which flowed like a girdle half round its sheltering hills, should sink into the navigable river, which, nearer to the ocean, it fed, without fulfilling some useful destiny — something more important, if less poetical, than laving the graceful willows that overhung its waters. In fact, rumor said that a great capitalist was in treaty

for some land, and that a paper-mill would be erected in the valley. The idea of a newspaper to support what seemed the tottering interests of Hartsdale, was certainly a bold one, and its establishment was a proof what great things determined perseverance may accomplish. Mr. Elliot was the apothecary of the place, but fortunately for him he possessed some private property, for really the Hartsdilians were so remarkably healthy that, otherwise, it is very probable his gentle wife and rosy children would have fared something worse than they did. Fortunate, too, was it in another sense; for his labors were so light, that they afforded him abundant leisure for the cultivation of a literary taste, which it was said had descended to him thus:—His grandfather had, in the brilliant days of his contemporary Hayley, contributed verses to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which same effusions, though published anonymously, were registered in the family archives as his; albeit certain critics of the time had attributed them to the immortal bard before mentioned. His immediate progenitor had once had the honor of dining in company with Byron—had even spoken to and shaken hands with him. Whereon it was supposed he took the infection of poesy; for immediately on his his return home, he, being very much in love with the lady who ultimately became Mr. Elliot's honored mamma, did indite to her sundry verses or stanzas, which were deemed in themselves so admirable, and every way worthy of preservation, that they were, on the occasion of the marriage, which took place soon afterwards, placed beside the celebrated printed extracts from the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In the present

Mr. Elliot the propensity had been more strongly and decidedly developed; he had been a poet from his youth; was quite accustomed to see himself in print; had thrice sent verses to the very editors who now treated his prose communications with so much neglect, which verses had been by them promoted to a place in the Poet's Corner of their respective journals; and had absolutely published a pamphlet on some political topic — I forget what — in which he took great interest.

It was now discovered that Mr. Elliot must have been intended by nature for a newspaper editor, an opinion in which, it must be confessed, he was not slow to join. And yet what a mighty weight of business fell on his shoulders! What consultations, what meetings, what tea-parties were there, before even a name could be decided on! At last, and by almost universal consent, 'The Hartsdale Vindicator' was adopted as a title that would express the championship, which was undertaken most completely. But when it was known to all the active spirits of the place, and to at least two-thirds of the Hartsdalian in general, that Mr. Elliot was self-appointed to the cares and difficulties of editing 'their paper,' it all at once occurred to him that an air of mystery was customary in these important literary offices. The majestic editorial we ought to be a concealing visor, as well as an Achilles' shield, from behind which the champion should hurl the arrows of honest indignation. Mr. Elliot knew himself to be but mortal: how could he be sure to resist the beseechings of friends, or the workings of party interests, if his privacy were to be

invaded by open petitions? How could he anathematize a railway, when his dearest friend confided to him that he held many shares therein? How could he utterly extinguish the spreading light of a new book, on the title-page of which appeared his name, 'with the author's kindest regards?' It was not to be thought of. No, the strictest incognito must be preserved; and forthwith the editor of the *Vindicator* was spoken of as a mysterious shade: indeed hints were thrown out (the Hartsdalian would not have told a downright fib for the world) of two or three of these incorporeal personages being rolled into one. It was almost, if not altogether impossible, they said, that one person could manage such an affair. A variety of style was indispensable. Departments of politics, literature, science, and art, were spoken about as things requiring each an Atlas shoulder for its support; and any confirmation of another's opinion beyond the nod or the shake of a head, was looked upon as an act of high treason. Of course there was a little knot, including the Misses Gunning, Major Stukely, and Louisa Somers, who owned to each other that they knew all about it.

The directing mental influence being thus decided on, and contributions of various sorts having been received, and accepted or rejected with due forms and proper courtesy, some duller and more matter-of-fact details came under discussion. As the little knot included the chief 'proprietors' of the work, they were consulted on the size of the projected paper, and the manner of printing it. One timid spirit suggested that it should be printed at the cathedral city, which was the

capital of the county ; but his single voice was drowned in the exclamations of disapprobation which escaped from the others, at a suggestion so derogatory to the proper dignity of all. The circumstance of Hartsdale not possessing a printing-press within the circle of its entire domain, was one of no importance ; or rather, such a fact brought to light was only a reason they should more quickly rid themselves of a reproach so suggestive of barbaric darkness. And I do not think the community will easily forget the day on which the carrier's cart brought in the dingy apparatus — a second-hand press, which had seen considerable service — whose destiny it was to usher forth the first number of the glorious Vindicator. Old and young, rich and poor, rushed forth to get a peep at it ; and, although the bells were not set ringing, I know many persons thought the omission very culpable.

The first number at length appeared, in all the importance of eight pages, three columns each. The title was printed on a flourishing scroll, and beneath it was seen a Shakspeare motto. The leading article treated temperately but firmly on the injuries the Hartsdalianians had endured, were suffering, and were likely to receive, from divers daring intruders on their rights and privileges. The local intelligence, on which considerable pains had been bestowed, was of a fair average quality, and that was all that could be expected. Louisa Somers — who would not write one line in opposition to what she felt were coming improvements, but who dared not yet become their defender, knowing well that to attack prejudices violently is the way to strengthen them — had contributed an amusing column of gossip

about a recent visit to the metropolis, and which every body who was not in the secret, attributed to a London correspondent; and somebody else had written a punning poem on the Ruin of the County, taking for his text certain fragments of brick and stone, said to be the remains of an ancient castle, but turning the word with punsterial dexterity to the miseries which threatened their hearths and homes. Altogether, the Hartsdale Vindicator was pronounced a neat and interesting paper. A copy was sent to Sir George, the member, who instantly subscribed for a twelvemonth's supply; and the early numbers went off capitally, for most of the Hartsdalian took several to send to distant friends. If the truth must be owned, however, the sale was not such as to promise an increase of revenue to the proprietors; and though friends flattered, strangers often applauded, and foes at any rate were silent, there were drawbacks on the dignity of proprietorship and the joys of editorial authority. The interval of a month between the numbers was a long one, and mischief of a grave kind was often done before the Vindicator had an opportunity of raising its voice in defence of good old customs. Excavations were made, and lines laid down, with alarming rapidity; a tall red chimney was already showing itself, seeming, at a little distance, to grow up foot by foot from the rich foliage which skirted the river; till it was soon evident that, before the end of the next summer, the paper-mills would be in full operation.

All looked on with terror and dismay, except Louisa Somers, the curate's sister, who ventured sometimes to own she thought it possible much good might arise

from the seeming evil. But then Louisa was not a Hartsdalian born or bred, and so her eccentric notions were looked upon with some leniency. And yet she must have loved Hartsdale very much, I think ; and certainly the poor of the place loved her most dearly, notwithstanding her heterodox opinions. Possessed of a small fortune, just enough for lady-like independence, and no more, she preferred the useful life she fashioned for herself, as mistress of her brother's quiet home, to all the vanities and vexations she might have found amid the gaieties of the metropolis, where the remainder of the family resided. But she was one of those young women, to whose lists I would fondly hope each year adds many, who believe that, whether high or low their station, they have duties to perform in the world apart from mere selfish gratifications, and who would blush to declare what I have twice heard gravely said, ' I have only to get up in the morning and amuse myself all day ! ' Louisa found something sweeter than amusement in the performance of the active duties she had marked out for herself, or perhaps, more properly speaking, had fallen into. She had made the great discovery, that it is truer benevolence to assist the poor to help themselves, than to bestow on them gold and silver ; and though some people thought it a great inconsistency, the fact remains, that she would often give out dresses of her own to be made by the chief dress-maker of Hartsdale, at the very time that she was devoting morning after morning to patiently instructing the children of the poor in the mysteries of the needle and the thimble, in which she was a great adept. Not that she neglected to perform the Christian.

duties of visiting the sick and feeding the hungry, but her chief aim in all her exertions was to instruct the young, and urge them to habits of self-dependence. And, alas! to own the truth, the poor of Hartsdale were very numerous and very wretched; they were of that low class with whom beggary is held to be no shame.

‘And, Martha,’ said Miss Somers one morning to her servant, as, with only a garden bonnet to shade her from the sun, and wearing a simple morning dress, which nevertheless was anything but unbecoming, she stood in the garden opposite the open laundry window, — ‘Martha, I have promised the widow Forster’s girls that they shall have the benefit of seeing you iron to-day. You know you are the best clear-starcher in the town, and I dare say they will be here directly. I had to bribe them, it is true, by offering to pay them for their assistance; but take care you let them touch only such things as they cannot spoil. Poor things, they are sadly——’

But at this moment Louisa stopped, for, happening to turn round, she perceived a gentleman, a stranger, just at her elbow.

‘Your pardon, Madam, for this intrusion,’ he exclaimed, removing his hat with an air of perfect good-breeding; ‘but as neither my groom nor I could discover the bell, I have left my horse with him, and ventured to enter at a side-gate which I found open. I have the honor of bearing a letter of introduction to Mr. Somers,’ he added, ‘and feel almost sure that I have the pleasure of addressing his sister.’

Miss Somers led the way to the drawing-room, which

in the curate's cottage was not very distant from the laundry, but where books, drawings, and musical instruments, proclaimed that the young mistress found time to cultivate the refinements of life, as well as discharge its useful active offices. The stranger was Mr. Percival, who had recently purchased the land by the water's edge, and was erecting paper-mills thereon. Louisa was not at all alarmed at her visitor, not even surprised to find him a handsome and very agreeable person; though it is pretty certain the Hartsdilians in general entertained much such a notion of him as children deeply read in fairy tales may be supposed to do of an ogre.

'From the few words I accidentally overheard,' said Mr. Percival, after chatting for a while on several more general topics, 'I feel sure that in Miss Somers I shall find no opponent to my views and wishes. You have discovered that the mere donation of money and food to the poor is but one way to increase pauperism, by destroying all feelings of self-respect and self-reliance. I foresee that you, madam,' he added with a smile, 'will not think it harder for a strong girl to fold or smooth paper for ten or twelve hours a day, than for her to walk half a dozen miles to some great house and back again in search of the refuse of the larder; and it may even occur to you that the meal honestly earned will in a very little time seem much the sweeter of the two.'

'I do think so,' replied Louisa; 'but I believe we must act by the poor of Hartsdale in the same manner as it is prudent to do with the higher classes of its inhabitants — we must let them perceive the advan-

tages of these coming changes themselves, rather than reiterate them from day to day. A prejudice is like a porcupine, which only bristles up the more it is attacked.'

Mr. Percival smiled at the simile, but heartily agreed with Louisa.

In short, after a somewhat lengthened morning visit, they parted, mutually pleased with each other ; he rejoicing that he had found one Hartsdalian — and that the one of all others the most popular among the poor — with liberal and enlightened views, and she perceiving that, though a Revolution was at hand, it must, from its nature, prove an entire Reformation.

The ensuing summer passed rapidly away, during which time the paper-works were completed, and operations commenced therein ; although the poor of the place, so newly startled from the sort of lethargy which had fallen on them, had not yet decided whether work was good for them or not. During this summer the monthly numbers of the Vindicator had duly appeared ; yet it was remarkable that its violent party spirit was somewhat tamed — at any rate, the editor had doubts if, after all, the mill might not prove a most opportune relief to the working classes. Advertisements connected with the railway crept in, affording a curious illustration of expanding usefulness. But among all the doings of that summer, perhaps not the least important to the Hartsdale community was the fact, that Mr. Percival had become a frequent and most intimate visitor at the curate's cottage ; and although it is quite certain he had the highest esteem and respect for Louisa's brother, it is equally true, what the Harts-

dalians had sometimes suspected, that he entertained yet warmer feelings for Louisa herself. To own the truth, the time appointed for their marriage was drawing near—a circumstance which will account most satisfactorily for the unrestrained confidence now existing between them.

They were in the drawing-room of the cottage, the scene of their first interesting conversation. Louisa was seated near the window, with the last number of the Hartsdale Vindicator in her hand, and Mr. Percival was leaning over her chair, reading some paragraph with her. Both smiled as their eyes met a moment afterwards.

‘You know I have discovered you are quite a literary lady,’ exclaimed Mr. Percival; ‘so tell me, Louisa dear, did you send that paragraph yourself?’

‘Vanity! Do you suppose I should praise you so much?’ she replied archly; but added in a moment, ‘Really and truly I have had nothing to do with it; but I told you long ago the worthy editor was coming round to our opinion of things in general; and here he shows himself a wise and brave man, by owning he has been in the wrong. I only hope this evident change in the Hartsdale politics may increase the sale of the paper, and so make up for past losses.’

‘Have they really lost so much by it?’ asked Mr. Percival, with evident interest.

‘Much is such a comparative word, I hardly know how to answer the question; especially to you who, in all your concerns, have to speak of tens of thousands rather than tens of pounds.’

‘Ay, but tens of pounds are often as important in

small undertakings as tens of thousands are in great ones. Do you know, I have sometimes thought of buying the Hartsdale Vindicator, employing a first-rate editor to conduct it, and make it what we really want, an important literary organ. Do you think this could be done? Do you believe the proprietors would sell it, or sell the right of conducting it? And, above all, do you think this generous amateur editor could be persuaded to lay down his wand of office?’

‘I am certain he would be but too delighted to do it,’ exclaimed Louisa; ‘for he owed to me the other day that it cost him much time and labor, and interfered sadly with his professional duties, which are very much on the increase since all the new villas are inhabited, and the railway enables him to visit several old patients who have removed. Dear Walter,’ she added with pride and animation, ‘you are really the good angel of the place!’

‘My angelic doings are of a very matter-of-fact mundane description,’ he replied laughing; ‘but you know I have some deep obligations to the Hartsdalian, since I take their best and wisest all to myself.’

‘Her who has been a traitor in the camp all along, you mean,’ she said, smiling; ‘did I not encourage the Vindicator at first, only because I knew that the more affairs were investigated, the more would the true interests of the place be discovered? If it could have been shown that the old state of things was the better one, I would have owned myself in error—as now some of our old friends have been brave enough to do.’

‘And it is for this very prudence that you are the wisest,’ repeated Mr. Percival.

Gladly did the proprietors of the Vindicator dispose of their shares to the great capitalist, especially as his offer was so liberal that it much more than remunerated them for their temporary loss. Behold, too, their pride in the first number brought out by the new potentate. It had grown to double its former size, and was to be published weekly : in fact, in outward appearance and absolute literary importance, it now competed with the County Herald itself — that insolent rival, that had not even deigned to notice its former existence ? No one, however, spoke of the early, modest Vindicator with contempt ; on the contrary, its double-sheeted offspring alluded in the most respectful terms to the service it had rendered the entire county, and the skill and taste with which it had been conducted ; and this was no more than truth, for its unpretending columns, devoted to subjects of local interest, had made the history, the beauties, and the advantages of the valley more extensively known than would have been likely to be the case from any other means. The consequence was, that capital was brought into the neighborhood, which, distributed in wages amongst the poor, was exactly, in its results, like a fertilizing stream to some arid desert. The temporary inconveniences inevitable from a state of transition are already nearly forgotten, or remembered only to provoke a smile. As an omnibus runs six times a day to the railway station, people have ceased to miss the stages. It is true the White Hart Inn is shut up, but very much more in consequence of a temperance movement among the poor, than because

the glories of the Telegraph have departed ; an event most significant of the happy moral elevation of the humbler classes.

The Misses Gunning are restored to the undisputed possession of their carriage ; and, as if to make amends for the trials to which poor Peter was subjected, he is now relieved from all floricultural duties, since his mistresses, having been tempted to invest some property in railway shares, find an increase in their income, which permits them to add a gardener to their establishment. Major Stukely was the last to hold out for good old customs ; but having been twice detected in walking to the station for the mere pleasure of seeing the train come up, he owned there was something very exciting and interesting in the contemplation of such stupendous undertakings — a confession which was taken on all hands as acknowledgment of a defeat. In fact, Hartsdale bids fair to become a considerable and important place, and to be as much distinguished for its intelligence, activity, wealth, and general prosperity, as it was in the ‘olden time’ for the wretchedness and ignorance of its poor, and the primitive condition of its general inhabitants. It is almost beyond the power of art to destroy the features of a really beautiful country ; and emotions arise in contemplating the advancement of mankind, it may be of a loftier kind than those which kindle at the sight even of the most exquisite scenery.



THE TEMPTERS AND THE TEMPTED.

'The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most?'

SHAKSPERE. *Measure for Measure.*

CHAPTER I.

It was an exceedingly comfortable dining-room, in an exceedingly comfortable house. The month was January, and the air was so clear and frosty, that every step which passed seemed to ring upon the pavement. Thick warm curtains, however, excluded all draught, and the brightest of fires blazed in the polished grate; while the clear light of a pendant lamp shone upon the dessert of chestnuts, in their snowy napkin, and golden oranges. Amber and ruby-tinted wines sparkled through the rich glass which held them; but the 'comfortable' party were only a trio — Mr. and Mrs. Dixon, and their son. They were people whom the world had used very kindly, who had never had a real trouble in their lives. No doubt they had imagined a few; and imaginary sorrows differ from real ones, I believe, chiefly in this — that they teach nothing, unless, indeed, their indulgence teach and strengthen selfishness.

Mr. Dixon was a fine-looking man, of about fifty,

with rather a pleasing expression of countenance. He was often visited by good, kind impulses, but a certain indecision of character had made him fall under the rule of his partner early in their married life ; and the instances, during twenty-five years, in which his best inclinations had been checked, were beyond all numbering. The lady, who was about five years his junior, bore every trace of having been a pretty woman, though on the *petite* scale. Yet there were people who did not like her face ; and certainly, bright as her eyes were, they put you in mind of March sunshine, with an east wind blowing all the time. Her lips were thin, and she had a trick of smiling, and showing her white teeth very often, even when she said the most disagreeable things. Richard Dixon, the son, bore a strong resemblance to his mother ; though, if the mouth were indicative of rather more sentiment than she possessed, it also betrayed more sensuality.

‘ This is a very serious charge, my dear,’ said Mr. Dixon, putting down the glass he had raised half-way to his lips ; ‘ are you sure there is no mistake ? ’

‘ Quite sure,’ replied the lady — ‘ quite certain Mary must have taken it. I put the piece of lace at the top of the drawer, and the key was never out of my possession, except when I intrusted it to her.’

‘ We never had a servant I should so little have suspected,’ returned Mr. Dixon.

‘ Nor I either,’ said the son ; ‘ and she is, out-and-out, the best housemaid we ever had — at least, the best that ever has been willing to stay.’

Truth always hits hard, and the color rose to Mrs. Dixon’s cheek. She was one of those ladies who

cannot 'keep their servants.' 'Then bad is the best, I am sure,' she exclaimed angrily; 'and for my part I am very glad she is going.'

'And I am very sorry,' said her husband. 'But why did you not tell me a month ago that you had given her warning, instead of leaving it in this way to the last moment?'

'Really I cannot see, Mr. Dixon, what you have to do with these arrangements. I mention the circumstance now, because the girl is leaving to-night, and because you will see a strange face to-morrow, and would wish to know all about it.'

'But what did she say, when you accused her of theft?'

'Accused her! You don't suppose I should have done such a foolish thing. A pretty scene there would have been. I know the fact, and that is enough; you don't believe I should have got back the lace, do you?'

'But justice, my dear, justice; surely you should tell her your suspicions.'

'Oh! now that I have engaged another servant — now that she is going, you can tell her if you like. But I don't see, myself, what use it is. She is sure to deny it, and then there will be a scene — and I hate scenes as much as you do.'

At that moment there was a slight tap at the parlor-door, and, obedient to the 'come in' of Mr. Dixon, the discarded Mary entered. She was a gentle-looking girl, of about twenty, attired in a dark cloak and straw bonnet. She came to take a dutiful leave of the family, and to ask a question which seemed not to have oc-

curred to the party before. In engaging herself with any future mistress, and referring to Mrs. Dixon for a 'character,' what was she to give as the reason that she was discharged?

So innocent, so interesting did Mary look — the tears just starting to her eyes at the thought of leaving the home of many months, and her cheek slightly flushed — that neither of the gentlemen could believe her guilty. But Mrs. Dixon was in the habit of engaging and discharging about a dozen servants a year, of one sort or another, and was quite hardened against 'appearances.'

Mr. Dixon evaded an immediate answer to Mary's question, by asking her whither she was going?

'I am going into a lodging, Sir.'

'That is a pity: have you no friends to stay with?'

'My friends are all in Wiltshire,' said the girl, with a sigh; 'and besides that it would cost me a great deal of money to go to them. I would rather look out for a place than make a holiday.'

'Your wages which I sent down to you, were quite right, I believe?' said Mrs. Dixon, with an icy dignity that was intended to close the conference.

'Quite right, thank you, ma'am,' replied Mary, with a courtesy; 'but, if you please, when I go after a place, what shall I say was the reason you discharged me?'

'I should think your own conscience must tell you,' replied the lady, smoothing her braided hair with her hand, as she had a trick of doing when she was growing angry. Poor Mary turned pale at these words, indefinite as they were, and could hardly

murmur — ‘Tell me, oh! tell me, what is it I have done?’

Her change of color was to Mrs. Dixon evidence of guilt; and with a sort of horrible satisfaction at this proof (to her) that she was right, the lady charged the poor girl with the theft which she had just mentioned to her husband. It was, indeed, a scene which followed — a very piteous one. Mary uttered but a few words of brief and emphatic denial — far removed from the loud asseverations which the guilty can sometimes deliver. Tears seemed driven back to her heart; and as she stood for a moment with clasped hands and rigid features, she looked like a statue of woe. Richard Dixon was by no means unmoved. He had his own reasons for believing her a girl of good principles. Like many other — more thoughtless perhaps, than heartless — young men, he never disguised his admiration of beauty to the object, even if the revealing it bordered on insult. And he remembered that Mary had always received his idle compliments with a dignity that repelled further rudeness, and with a deportment that he should have admired in a sister. He placed a chair near Mary, and begged her to be seated; but absorbed in her own misery, she took no notice of the attention. Meanwhile, Mr. Dixon had poured out a glass of wine, and offered it to her exclaiming — ‘I must hope there is some mistake. I cannot believe this of you.’

The word and act of kindness seemed to melt the statue, and she burst into tears. But Mrs. Dixon felt this would never do. It was time now for her to play a more interesting part in the drama, and applying

her filmy lace-bordered handkerchief to her eyes, she leaned back in her chair, and sobbed out reproaches to her husband for his cruelty in doubting her word. Poor man ! what could he think — what could he do ? Chiefly, I believe, he resolved never — never again — to interfere between two of womankind ; and hurrying poor Mary to the hall-door, where a cab and her boxes awaited her, he put a sovereign into her hand, as a remembrance of her kind attention to the buttons of his shirts, and such et ceteras. The gold dropped from her grasp, as she exclaimed — ‘ No, Sir, — my character ! my character ! ’

Mr. Dixon stooped for the money, and pressed it upon her again — till, trusting to his assurances that he did not believe her guilty, and that he would see her righted, she consented to accept it.

It is a subject of painful interest to ask how the hundreds and thousands of female servants ‘ out of place,’ in this palpitating heart — this great metropolis — contrive to exist for weeks and even months together, as they do, upon the scanty savings from their scanty wages ? And plain as the duty is of employers not to deceive one another, by giving an unjust character of a servant, or hiding glaring faults, there is a terrible responsibility in depriving a young woman of a situation, which is not, I fear, generally sufficiently felt. It seems too often forgotten that servants have peculiarities of temper and disposition as well as their mistresses, and that she who would not suit one family might be admirably adapted to please another. Surely, it is the most truthful, as well as the most humane plan, in a mistress, to allude only to the moral attributes

of character; judging charitably—if there be no knowledge darker than doubt—of the general acquirements. Sensible people may commonly get on well with servants who speak the truth, and have a tolerable share of brains: so much that is valuable must follow in the wake. If one cannot have both, truth is even more precious than sense. What was poor Mary to do, robbed of her character for honesty?

A day or two after her dismissal, she called upon Mrs. Dixon, re-asserting her innocence, and imploring her mistress to give her such a character as would procure her a situation. But the mistress was firm in her resolve to tell the circumstance to any lady who might call just as it had occurred. It would be tedious to narrate the trials of the friendless girl. How one stranger would have received her into her house, but for this unfortunate episode revealed by Mrs. Dixon; and how, on Mary defending herself with tears and entreaties, the half-convinced lady declared she would have taken her, had Mary told the story *at first*. Prompted by this assertion, in her next application she confessed the suspicion which attached to her; but there is very strong *esprit de corps* among mistresses, and they very seldom think each other wrong. The lady could not fancy Mrs. Dixon had been mistaken. It was after these sorrows that the thought occurred to her of applying to the mistress with whom she had lived previously to her service with Mrs. Dixon, and who had discharged her only in consequence of reducing her establishment. Alas! she had left the neighborhood, to reside near a married daughter; but, as they had paid every bill with scrupulous exactness, not

one of the tradespeople could tell her whither they had gone. The nearest intelligence she could gain was, 'Somewhere in Kent.' Poor Mary! her last anchor of hope seemed taken from her.

CHAPTER II.

WINTER had given place to Spring; but though the frost no longer bleached the pavement, or crisped all moisture, and though the sun seemed struggling to warm the atmosphere, there was a cold wind which would have rendered warm garments very acceptable, and which blew through the thin shawl of a young girl, as she stood at the corner of a street, talking to a friend a few years older than herself. The latter appeared more a favorite of fortune than poor Mary, for she was the shivering girl. Now *millionaires* can afford to dress in rusty black, and a great many of the sterner sex are either careless to slovenliness about their equipments, or disfigure themselves by a horrible taste; but it may be taken as a general rule, subject to but few exceptions, that women — especially young and pretty ones — dress as well as their means will permit. Hence the warmer, richer clothing of Mary's companion proclaimed her better off in the world.

'It must come to that, or worse,' said Mary, with a shudder, and the tears stood in her eyes, which shone with that strange glassy lustre that often accompanies, perhaps reveals, intense mental suffering. 'After all,

as you say,' she continued, 'it would not be a false character, for I never wronged any one of a farthing's worth in my life. If it could be managed — if I could but get a place!'

'Oh, it can be managed, never fear. Do you suppose that I could not act the fine lady, when I have acted at a real theatre for three seasons, and done much harder things, I can tell you. I don't say but what I shall expect you to do me a good turn some of these days, if I should want it.'

'What can I ever do for you,' exclaimed Mary — 'you, who are so much above me!'

Poor Mary! how sadly had her heart been warped by Temptation, how sadly must her self-respect have been lowered before she could have formed such an estimate of herself — fallen, or falling, as she already was! Perhaps it were best not to inquire what were the probable services this unprincipled woman expected in return for giving the false character. It is hardly to be supposed that she had sought the acquaintance of the friendless girl without some selfish plan or motive. They stood talking a few minutes longer, and then walked away in different directions: the elder with the confident air of one who had carried herself successfully through many schemes of deception; the other, trembling and abashed at the first breaking down of the barriers of integrity. Oh! ye thoughtless women in your homes of ease — ye, whose breath can give or take away reputation — be merciful in your judgment of her, and pause well ere, on some similar occasion, you drive a helpless female to desperation.

Oh! it was pitiful,
Near a whole city full,
Friend she had none.

Mary had no longer the means of returning to her family in Wiltshire ; she was already reduced to poverty's sad extremity, and had that very morning conveyed her warm cloak to the safe keeping of the pawnbroker. Besides, how could she have borne to go as a disgraced pauper among the large poor family to which she belonged ? among those who had looked with such pride upon their 'sister in service in London ?'

And yet, notwithstanding her many griefs, and the gaunt figure of absolute Want which loomed upon her, and was drawing nearer and nearer, she had refused assistance only the day before from her 'young master,' whom she had chanced to meet in the street, and who had accosted her, apparently with much sympathy. From him she had learned that Mrs. Dixon was as implacable as ever ; yet, though he pressed silver, and even gold, upon her, let us be thankful she was still hedged round by the feelings of delicacy and feminine propriety, which forbade her accepting money from 'an admirer.' Surely, the world-hardened Tempters do not always know the dreadful work they are about !

'If you please, ma'am, do you know of a place ?' was the inquiry of Mary, about an hour after she had parted with her new acquaintance. She had entered a respectable-looking baker's shop, in one of the great thoroughfares.

'What sort of a place ?' said the mistress, a good-

tempered, good-looking young woman, of seven or eight and twenty, who was just then sweeping the counter with a hand-brush, with great activity. Mary, by the way, had observed at a glance that shop, and counter, and hand-brush, and all appurtenances, were what everything belonging to a baker's shop should be, exquisitely clean and neat; and that the mistress herself, in her snowy cap, and light-colored cotton dress, was a pattern of neatness.

'I could take a housemaid's place, ma'am,' replied Mary, 'or servant of all-work in a small family.'

'Lor! I wonder if you would suit us?' said Mrs. Allen, the baker's wife; 'we sent off our servant in a great huff last night, and I have no one to do a stroke for me, except the nurse girl, and she has enough to do with three children to mind. Could you come directly — to-day, I mean?'

'Yes, ma'am, to-day, if you like.'

Then followed the ordinary questions, and, of course, among them — 'Where did you live last?'

'*With Mrs. Smith, ma'am, No. 20, — Street.*'

Alas, alas, poor Mary!

'And can you have a good character?'

'I am sure I can, ma'am. I only left because Captain Smith was obliged to go with his ship, and Mrs. Smith did not want two servants any longer.'

'Well, wait here in the shop a bit, while I go and speak to my husband. James, James,' she continued, calling from some stairs which led to the bake-house, 'I want you.' And up there came a portly-looking man, with shirt-sleeves tucked up, and his arms covered above the elbows with flour and dough. The

Allens were a happy couple, well to do in the world, and in good humor with it and themselves. An attentive listener might have heard something about 'tidy-looking girl: think she'd just do: but here it's Friday: I am sure I never can get out for her character either to-day or to-morrow.'

'That's a pity,' said the husband.

'If we could but be sure of her honesty, I wouldn't mind taking her, and then going for her character next week. What do you say, James?'

'My dear, how can we be sure?'

'She wouldn't be so stupid as to say she could have a good character if she were not honest,' replied the wife, whose mind seemed veering very much towards trying her.

'That's true,' exclaimed the baker, as if a new light were let in on the subject.

'Come and see her,' said the wife.

There were two or three customers waiting in the shop, but during Mrs. Allen's short absence, her second child, a little girl of about three years old, had 'made friends' with Mary, and was clinging to her hand, and looking up in her face, as if she were an old acquaintance. It may be that this was the feather which pleased the parents, and turned the scale.

The feelings with which Mary learned that she was to be received in this unusual manner, and that the falsehood which was planned would not be acted for three days to come, at least, were something like those we may imagine a culprit to entertain, when he receives a respite of his sentence. A dim hope would make itself felt, a dim hope that something would occur to prevent it being carried into execution.

With what wonderful activity Mary set to work, or how anxiously she strove to please, words cannot easily tell. But the Lie was a haunting Presence that seemed to banish even the hope of happiness. The honest baker and his wife were evidently well satisfied with their new servant. The advantage, by which she had profited, of living in a family belonging to a higher station, enabled her to do many things in a superior way; and the Allens were people to appreciate all this. And the neat and nice manner in which she served the Sunday's dinner, of which a couple of friends partook, was duly commented on. Then the children 'took to her' amazingly, and the circumstance of her discovering a half sovereign which had strangely escaped from the till, seemed to give them the most perfect confidence in her honesty; so that, when on the afternoon of Tuesday, the appointment having been duly made with the fictitious Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Allen was equipped in a handsome silk dress, ready to go 'after Mary's character,' she almost felt that it was a mere form, so certain was she of the girl's acquirements and integrity.

This was a dreadful moment to Mary. She felt as if her quickly-beating heart sent the blood to the crown of her head; and that the next instant it receded, and left her ready to faint; while all the events of her troubled career rushed in strange distinctness before her, even to the history she had learned of the baker's former servant having been discharged for telling a falsehood. But then he had said—'We would have forgiven her if she had not persisted in it!'

By an uncontrollable impulse, as Mrs. Allen was

leaving her parlor, Mary seized the skirt of her dress, and throwing herself on her knees before her, exclaimed, amid a passionate torrent of tears—‘*It is your goodness that has saved me!* Oh, hear me, hear me!’ And then, in broken phrases, she poured out the story of her trials and temptations.

Sad was it to see the altered looks of her benefactors, and to hear the cold and mournful tone in which Mrs. Allen said—‘So, you have deceived me after all: you would have cheated me with a False Character;’ and the good and naturally kind-hearted woman sank on her chair, overcome with the surprise.

‘We cannot help you,’ said the baker sternly.

‘Mercy—mercy!’ exclaimed the poor girl, and, weak from recent scanty fare—for she had been too wretched to eat during even the few days that abundance had been before her—she fainted outright. When she came to herself she was stretched on a sofa, with master and mistress both leaning over her. There was pity on their faces, and tears rolled down Mrs. Allen’s cheeks. In loosening her dress, in their endeavors to restore her, they had come upon a packet of pawnbroker’s duplicates, the dates of which, and the nature of the articles pledged, were a touching confirmation of her story. From the ‘cornelian brooch,’ so easily dispensed with, to the necessary cloak, and a prayer-book, the mournful chain was complete.

‘We will not turn you away,’ said the baker, ‘just yet: we will try you a little longer.’

‘Your goodness has saved me!’ was all the stricken girl could utter.

‘But,’ continued he, ‘my wife will go immediately to your real mistress, and hear her version of the story. Certainly your confession is voluntary, and I do not believe you are hardened in deception.’

Mrs. Allen set off, and the distance being considerable, she was gone upwards of two hours. What an eternity they seemed to the poor servant !

‘Well, my dear,’ exclaimed the baker, when at last she returned, ‘what do you think ?’

‘Why I think, James, that a great many people who call themselves ladies are no ladies at all. Would you believe it, this Mrs. Dixon has found the piece of lace she accused the girl of stealing — found it slipped behind the drawer, or something of the sort ; and except for her own regret at sending away a good servant, I don’t think she feels her wickedness a bit. Poor girl, I cannot help pitying her. It was very wrong to attempt to cheat us with a false character, but it’s my belief we none of us know what we should do if we were sorely tempted. And besides, you see she was not equal to carrying out the deception.’

‘Let us keep her,’ was the baker’s emphatic rejoinder.

‘Why, I don’t know that we can,’ said Mrs. Allen. ‘Mrs. Dixon says she’ll take her back, if she likes to go, for the lady has had three housemaids since she left, and you know it is a much grander place than ours. At any rate, she promises to give her an excellent character.’

‘Did you tell this Mrs. Dixon about the intended false character ?’

‘No, I didn’t; for I soon found out how matters

were, and I felt I should have been wicked to do the girl a further mischief.'

'Quite right, my love,' said the baker.

Mary was called in, and the facts related. With tearful joy, and amid thanksgiving to Heaven, she implored that her benefactors would allow her to stay with them, rejecting, with something like scorn, the idea of a 'grander' place. Faithfully has she now served them for years; and promoted to the dignity of shopwoman, she is looked upon rather as a tried friend than anything else. But even in the sunshine of happiness she never forgets that it is the 'goodness,' as she calls it, of the baker and his wife which have saved her.

Alas for the rarity
Of Christian Charity!

How often would a generous trust save the sorely tempted!

A TALE THAT WAS TOLD TO ME.

‘Restore the Dead, thou Sea.’

MRS. HEMANS.

AMID scenes of strange adventures, dauntless daring, appalling dangers, and unimagined perils, I believe every one, from the idiosyncrasy of his own mind, finds a peculiar interest in some one particular range of subjects; and it may be that the eagerness with which we read or listen when such scenes are described is the evidence of a taste which, with over-indulgence, would grow morbid, or of an enthusiasm quite capable of becoming extravagant. I confess to such a weakness myself. I can listen with comparative calmness to the most exciting narratives of all land expeditions and adventures, whether they include an Alpine ascent or an encounter with banditti; a lonely march on the wild Prairie, or the passage of a caravan across the scorched and scorching Desert. But directly the wanderer lifts his foot from the dry land, and trusts himself to the slumbering Ocean, a new train of feelings has birth, and the interest in a stranger’s safety quickens into something really approaching personal sensation.

Let the red earth of battle-fields proclaim trumpet-tongued *their* story, and the trampled human clay rise

up in judgment to bear it witness. The tale is blazoned on history's page through the long course of the rolling centuries; the courage of Action always, and — of Endurance sometimes. But the glittering tinsel wreath of glory only hides the ghastly Moloch-idol War; and I am dull at perceiving the subordinate heroism whose leading spring is mean ambition, avarice or hate. Such heroism, too, finds always a chronicler; but Ocean is for the most part the keeper of its dread secrets, and only from the faint breath which now and then floats across the waves may we guess at the human agonies the remorseless waters have at once created and extinguished! Perhaps it is this vagueness — the certainty that stranger tales remain untold than any which rumor has caught and echoed — which lends so strong an interest to stories of shipwreck or disasters at sea, appealing to the unsatisfied imagination until it aches with the realization of the scene. And yet what deeds of self-denial and noble self-devotion *are* registered and stand forth in their lovely radiance, to redeem and vindicate mankind; alas! beside those awful revelations of brute selfishness to which it would seem that inferior natures are reduced in the hour of imminent peril! But this is a long introduction to the tale that was told to me.

There were more passengers on board the good ship Falcon than I should care to number. Many were young, and for the most part buoyant with hope, as became the living freight of the 'outward bound.'

India is not looked upon exactly as it was even fifteen or twenty years since. People are not quite sure that gold is to be picked up there for the stooping,

or that diamonds are showered down at the feet of Europeans ; but still there is a prevalent notion, vague enough sometimes, that fortune is more easily wooed beneath the orient heavens than under that soberer sky which canopies the spot of earth called England — a spot indeed ! rising from the blue waters just large enough to be a throne whence delegates are sent to rule the world, and to which her children-wanderers look up with loving loyalty. Well is it that youth is prone to build its fairy castles, and does *not* dream of early death, or lingering, life-sapping disease, or of enervated mind — the irremediable penalties too often paid for all that the tropics can give. And so the ardent cadet has more often a vision of knighthood and crosses of honor than of ‘sick leave’ and blighted hopes ; and the merchant thinks less of an arid and forgotten grave, than of returning in manhood’s prime with the gold that he teaches his heart shall recompense love for its long and lonely martyrdom.

Among the passengers of the *Falcon*, however, was one not exactly belonging to the usual category of outward-bound adventurers. Mr. Francis Rayton had made his fortune in India, and that in a very few years. He was something under forty, and had suffered less from the climate than most English residents in Calcutta. Nevertheless, his physicians had recommended the long sea-voyage in preference to the overland route, since it was absolutely necessary that he should, for a few months, return to wind up mercantile affairs, in which tens of thousands of pounds were involved. His active, energetic mind demurred at this decision for awhile ; yet he gave way, for

health had never seemed so precious as now that fortune had made hope reality, and all the beautiful things of life were opening to him. Francis Rayton was not a common character; and eager, almost greedily, as he had sought wealth, he had never sought it as an end.

Caroline Smythe was a girl of twenty, the daughter of a general officer, going out under the protection of a widowed friend, to join her parents. She had the beauty of youth, and a little beauty besides; with all the pride of what the Spaniards call 'blue blood;' and that pride, in addition, which I never yet found wanting in a soldier's daughter. She would not have married a merchant if life and death had hung in the balance, for she would not have suffered her own heart to touch the beam; but she was a coquette to that heart's core, and Francis Rayton was by far the handsomest and most intellectual man on board the *Falcon*. How was it possible she could refuse to gratify the chief *besoin* of her existence?

Helen Seymour was making the voyage without other protection than that of the blunt but kind-hearted captain. Perhaps she did not require any at all. She was not very young; sometimes she looked about five-and-twenty, at others you would have taken her for thirty at least. She was neither handsome nor beautiful — far less could she have been called pretty; that term would have seemed at once a something too much and too little to award her. Yet she was not plain. Her figure was good; she had a small, white, well-shaped hand, and most people thought she had a 'nice' face; but few knew the expression which,

when happy or animated, beamed through her eyes, flushed in her cheek, and quivered round her lips. Few, because happiness had been doled out to her most scantily, and she was not of that lucky temperament which can find excitement in trifles. Helen had already outlived her nearest relations, and she was poor; going out to India to educate the children of a second cousin, who entertained the romantic notion of bringing them up in one of the healthier northern settlements, instead of following the commoner plan, and tearing her own heart-strings by sending them to England.

Two more individuals will complete the cluster it is necessary to describe. James Lawson had been for some years a confidential clerk or agent to Mr. Rayton, and was now going out to be left in a situation of considerable trust in the Calcutta establishment. His wife and infant child were with him; and as they made home of any spot of earth, he did not pretend to sentimental regrets at leaving his native land for a long and indefinite period. The young couple had struggled through the early trials of poverty; and their affection had previously been tested by absence and a long engagement; but now, after three years of wedded happiness, and bright fortune shining steadily in the horizon, life seemed something more precious, more soul-satisfying than even youthful dreams had pictured it. The Lawsons were quiet and retiring in their deportment; for, with a feeling which has quite as much pride as humility in it, they were conscious that they were only recently lifted a step or two in society. But Helen Seymour had an intuitive knowl-

edge of character ; and knowing them very speedily, could not help being interested. Scarcely cultivated enough in mind to be congenial companions to her, she yet honored them most truly, and in witnessing their affection, felt as if something in which she had before half blindly believed was now made known to her. There was a manly tenderness in his behavior towards his wife, as far removed from lover-like adulation as it was deeper in its springs and dearer to her heart—manly, for that same tenderness, the very exhalation of true heart-love, is an attribute that never does emanate from the vain, selfish egotist, or the frivolous butterfly of the world, or from the not more manly slave of his own ardent passions. And then, on little Fanny's part—for she was a little creature, and looked up to him literally as well as figuratively—the entire devotion, and perfect unbroken, unclouded confidence, were something beautiful to witness ; and with the constant ministering of each to the other, made up a spectacle the most delightful in the world to the quick eye of the poet-philosopher ; and Helen, however humble in the ranks, yet, like many others, who had never ‘penned their inspirations,’ belonged to that class.

It would fill a volume to detail, scene by scene, how intimacies were formed between some of the parties I have named. Amid the nearly incessant occupation of his past life, Mr. Rayton had had very little opportunity of mixing in female society, or perhaps that which he had met in India had not been sufficiently attractive to induce him to make opportunities and cultivate it. Even while in London, business had pressed so heavily

upon him, that some of his oldest and most valued friends he had neglected to visit. But life on board the Falcon, where at least no post came in or went out, was comparative leisure ; and he was hardly sensible how much of that leisure was in reality filled up by conversation with Helen Seymour. Some mysterious affinity of feeling and opinion seemed to have drawn them together ; and yet there were two or three of the attributes against which he had entertained a positive prejudice. For instance, he had always thought politics quite out of the scope of a woman's reasoning ; yet when he found Helen's mind familiar with the great truths of humanity — those truths to the exposition of which his ardent yet half secret ambition lured him — the earnestness of life, and the thousand topics which must branch from such conclusions, he could not but acknowledge, though not without surprise, that her sympathy and companionship were none the less delightful because she was a woman.

It was not in a coquette's nature to look calmly on while the object she had selected for a flirtation showed an evident preference for an ' old maidish ' rival. Caroline certainly knew nothing of politics beyond having been taught to scorn, with all the hate of ignorance, the very party to which Rayton belonged ; if, indeed, one of so wide and comprehensive a mind could have narrowed it to the jealousies which seem inseparable from party feeling or connection. But she had a trick of appealing to him for information, and throwing herself on his forbearance, in that pretty, confiding, feminine manner, that is by no means without its fascination ; and it was not easy to meet the glance

of her soft large hazel eyes, as, with a toss of her head, she threw back her clustering ringlets, and made acknowledgments, at the same moment, of any mental deficiencies. Caroline had nothing in the past but school-girl days and — her numerous conquests — to remember, and the present seemed made to enjoy according to her fleeting inclinations. Helen had felt, and seen, and suffered — had *lived* all her past, and for the future was brave to endure and high principled to act. Francis Rayton stood between a good and an evil genius, and had he questioned his own heart he would have discovered the fact. But he did not do so — he had always looked on love as an episode in a man's life, and one that should only be indulged in on a proper occasion. Now this occasion he had for years been accustomed to consider his final settlement in England; and so he suffered himself to be swayed by the impulse of the moment, and what is so very foolishly called chance.

Weeks had passed — they expected to touch at the Cape in a day or two.

'Pray take my arm for a turn on deck this delicious evening,' said Mr. Rayton, approaching Helen, who was standing near one of the lady passengers. Helen never sought any particular attention from him, but perhaps she did not quite conceal that it gave her pleasure to receive it.

'I never beheld so beautiful a sky,' she exclaimed, pointing to the horizon, where the moon was rising, like an orb of gold, out of the dark waters. 'And the sea,' she continued, 'slumbering like a gentle friend, instead of the cruel tyrant which we know an hour might make it.'

‘Nay,’ said Rayton, ‘do not let us think of storms and danger. Our voyage has hitherto been so prosperous, and I have such faith in the Falcon, that I do not suffer myself to dream of disasters.’

‘You speak with all the confidence of an old voyager,’ replied Helen, smiling; ‘but beyond a steamboat excursion of a day or two, this is my first acquaintance with ‘blue water,’ and I am not yet sure how far I confide in it.’

This allusion to steamboat excursions led to reminiscences of Helen’s continental travel; and though she had often spoken on the subject before, to Rayton’s ear there always seemed something new to tell, for she described scenes he had ardently longed to visit. Possibly some vague notion crept into his mind that she would be a charming companion amid the ruins of empires, in the galleries of art, or wherever the spirit of poetry hovered. Talking of Art led, I cannot tell how, though it often does — to the subject of Love; and Helen spoke with the frankness of a true-hearted woman, who was far too honest to feign either indifference or ignorance of the theme. And so they conversed earnestly, not flippantly, on the great Lottery of Life, from which so few prizes and so many blanks are drawn — or rather, over which it would seem some evil destiny presides to mismatch the assorted pairs. It might be fancy, but each thought there was a slight quiver in the voice of the other, and a modulation that made the tone different from that of ordinary discourse. There was something, too, in the solemn grandeur of the moonlit ocean that well accorded with the sentiment which ruled the hour; for if the loveliness of nature

fails among coarser clay to awaken the loftiest sympathies of humanity, its contemplation always 'feeds the flame' where once it is kindled. Again Francis Rayton and Helen Seymour spoke of tempest and shipwreck; but now the theme was blended with stories of heroism and devotion, and of the loving hearts that had gone down together. Even Rayton — the busy money-winner, the man of the world — though capable of deeper sentiment and purer passion than he himself was aware — acknowledged that there might be cases in which such a death would be sweeter than all life could give to the solitary survivor.

'Of this I am sure,' he exclaimed, 'that the impulse of the moment, while it ruled the conduct, would be the test of the heart's affection.'

Was it impulse, or accident, or absence of mind, that made him press for an instant, almost with an interlacing of the fingers, the ungloved hand which rested on his arm?

On the second finger of that hand, Helen constantly wore a beautiful emerald ring, nearly the only ornament of value which had been remarked about her, and which she had on one occasion spoken of as her dearest memorial, that of a dead sister.

Rayton's little finger was encircled by a curious antique cameo.

They were silent: but the silence to one heart at least had a delicious meaning. It was broken by a voice close at hand.

'Oh, Mr. Rayton,' said a tall cadet, a boy in years, but longing beyond all things to be considered a man — 'Oh, Mr. Rayton, pray come and try your persua-

sions with Miss Smythe ; she won't touch her guitar for all we can beg and implore. But every one says a word from you will be sufficient.'

' Really, they do me honor,' replied Rayton, hesitating, and not at all grateful for having his *tête-à-tête* broken.

' Pray go,' said Helen, with a beautiful smile ; for she was one of those women as incapable of feeling mean petty jealousy, as she was of herself giving cause for it.

He went ; and the sullen beauty relented at what were, after all, but common-place compliments. She sang several French and Spanish love-songs, now archly, now pathetically ; and as the evening waned, Rayton found himself drawn into the vortex of frivolity, and lavishing all his *petits soins* on the coquettish Caroline. Helen was not present, either to share his attentions, or distract him from them. Fresh from that interview, she could not have joined the general society of their fellow-passengers. She lingered for some time on deck, and if—as she leaned her head on her hand and gazed upon the heaving waters—her reverie had been translated into words, it would have run thus :

' So good—so noble !—so *true*—I am sure. Oh, that we had met years ago—I could have made him happy, and helped him to be great. Yet now if it were possible'—and she pressed her hands to her side, as if to still her heart's wild beating, then covered her face with them—' at least it will be happiness enough for me to love him—yet could I endure he should love another ? ' And reverie melting into prayer, she

ejaculated, 'Oh, God, have mercy upon me! the first love of ignorant youth is faint and flickering — now I know that it is the *last* love which is destiny!'

But the breeze had freshened; for long unnoticed by Helen till she shivered in her light mantle, and then she sought her cabin, and her flushed cheek pressed the pillow, while still the one reverie prevailed — the beautiful reverie of the ideal made palpable — dissolving from time to time, as before, into the devout petition, 'Oh, God have mercy upon me!'

And the breeze still freshened; but those who were wearing away the hours with song and mirth and idle speech, heeded it not, and in a few hours even they sought slumber; and all were dreaming, sleeping or waking dreams, save the watchful crew who guarded and guided the floating palace.

But the breeze still freshened; and there were heavings and rollings of the stately vessel, that made rest and slumber difficult or impossible. And there were noises overhead; and the trampling of many feet, and the hauling of ropes, and the quick command — sometimes the angry word and muttered imprecation. And behold when morning dawned there was a murky sky above, chequered from time to time by the swiftly driving clouds, that seemed but the servants of the fierce capricious winds. The treacherous ocean, lashed to fury, heaved and foamed in monstrous billows round the devoted ship; and the shrieking cry of the sails, as they split like paper, was scarcely to be distinguished amid the roar of the tempest! Terror and anxiety had set their seal on every countenance; brave men grew pale and silent, and timid women wept and prayed aloud.

Very few were so calm as Helen Seymour; she spoke words of hope and encouragement to the fearful and fainting; exhorted even the rough sailors to do their duty with brave composure, and seemed by her own example to instruct all to meet with resignation the will of Providence, yet to use all human means to avert disaster. A terrible calamity was at hand; the skilful captain and two men at his side were swept by one huge and sudden wave into the surging waters. In a desperate attempt to rescue them, a boat and more lives were lost. For awhile the very will of those who were next in command seemed paralyzed, and confusion reigned. It was during this time that Helen applied herself to assuaging the sufferings of a poor woman who had been injured by the fall of a mast, rending her own dress to bind up the bleeding arm.

Francis Rayton gazed at her from time to time, and spoke to her occasionally; but mingling with his admiration, a feeling almost of awe crept over him. She seemed something above himself—even beyond his comprehension; yet ever as her eyes met his, there was a light of faith and trust and almost gladness shone from them, which was more divine than that of any earthly hope.

Lawson and his wife sat hand in hand; at intervals large silent tears rolled down poor Fanny's cheeks, which more than once he kissed or wiped away; and he had wound a large scarf around her in such a manner that it supported the infant in her arms, and held it inextricably there. Caroline Smythe had been of the crouching, weeping party, though possibly too

ignorant to be really conscious of their absolute peril ; and sometimes she appealed to Rayton, as if his word were a fiat, or clung to his arm, as if there dwelt protection.

One disaster followed another, till the Falcon, like some noble animal maimed and shorn of its limbs, lay almost a helpless log upon the waters ; and soon the catastrophe dreaded from the first was fatally realized. The ship struck upon the rocks, and the only hope of dear life rested with the boats. The crash of noises, cries, and prayers, and bursts of passionate agony, made up a scene of terror, such as sharers or witnesses have often attempted to describe.

‘ Quick—quick, Miss Seymour,’ said Rayton, approaching Helen, and taking her by the arm, ‘ there is not a moment to be lost—think not of property, let us save only ourselves.’

‘ Let me,’ replied Helen, (*as she was nearly saying,*) ‘ wait for the second boat—I can be of use here.’

And she spoke truly ;—she was of that great use which a calm and superior mind always is in swaying inferior natures. She was exhorting to composure and cheering with hopeful words a party of steerage passengers, who but for this influence might have added to the struggle and confusion around. At this moment, wild with terror, yet looking very beautiful nevertheless, Caroline Smythe rushed towards Mr. Rayton, and sank almost fainting into his outstretched arms. The profusion of her rich dark hair, which curled in natural ringlets, fell over his shoulder, and, borne by the tempest-blast, streamed across his face. Helen Seymour looked up, but she met not his gaze ; Rayton’s eyes

were fixed on the chiselled features of the deathlike countenance that almost touched his cheek. 'Speed — speed,' was the cry on every side, and, swayed by the 'impulse of the moment,' Francis Rayton placed Caroline in the boat, and, yielding to her murmured persuasion, stayed beside her!

Now seemingly engulfed in the waters, then rising on the crest of a foaming billow, the first boat sped on towards the shore, while the second was rapidly filling with half desperate fugitives. There was a general cry that the women should be saved first.

'My love — my life!' exclaimed Fanny Lawson, clinging to her husband with passionate agony; 'swear to me that we shall not be parted; swear that you will not urge me to enter the boat if there be not room for both.'

But for only answer, while he supported her with one arm, he pressed the other hand to his eyes, as if he dared not look upon her. 'Come — come,' said a sailor, attempting to lead her away; but Fanny had fainted, and Lawson, taking her in his arms as if she had been a child, pressed a frantic kiss upon her motionless lips, and bore her away towards the boat. Like a bale of merchandise was she passed from hand to hand, while Lawson flung himself upon the deck of the fast-filling ship, in the utter prostration of his agony. A sailor was assisting Helen Seymour to step across masses of cordage and fragments of various kinds; her countenance was of a deathlike paleness, and her lips were compressed by some firm determination. Yet even in this hour of life and death, she stooped to pick up an object which had rolled towards her feet; it was

Francis Rayton's cameo ring, which must have dropped from his finger.

'Lawson! — come — quickly,' said Helen, speaking rapidly, yet with wonderful calmness. Then, as they approached the edge of the vessel, and addressing the crew, who were only waiting for her, she continued: 'I yield my place to James Lawson; — let not two loving hearts be parted.'

There was a hush of wonder and admiration, even amid the terror of the moment; but events might have changed their course, had not Fanny recovered her senses, and seeing only that her husband hesitated joining the fugitives, without comprehending why, she stepped on the edge of the boat with the gesture of one who would fling herself from it. By an instinct rather than a process of reasoning, her husband stretched towards her, and, falling back, she drew him after her.

'Do not grieve for me,' said Helen Seymour, as the boat was loosened from the wreck, and — for the tempest had lulled — her clear tones were heard distinctly. 'Do not grieve — there is still a chance of rescue for me; but if I die, I do so willingly. Yesterday life was precious — to-day it is valueless.'

Alas! the one remaining chance was desperate; as, indeed, her generous heart foreboded. The last and smallest boat was not seaworthy; it filled and went down even in the attempt to launch it. Some three or four sailors still remained on the wreck; and warmed to self-sacrifice by Helen's example, they tried to construct a raft for her security; but materials were wanting, and with blank countenances they gave up the attempt in despair. 'Waste not time and strength

for me, my friends,' said Helen, in a clear low tone; you are strong swimmers, and have a chance of life. For me it is the Death Hour; and though death comes with few terrors, I would meet it alone — in silent, prayerful thought. It is sweet to know the father is not torn from wife and child — three human beings made happy.' And while she spoke, she wreathed one arm round so much of the shivered mast as remained, as if she had taken her final stand in the sinking ship. One of the sailors clung to her hand, and kissed it, swearing it were best to die with her, and seek her angel intercession at the gates of heaven; and another implored her to trust to his strong arm, that should struggle with her towards the shore.

'No life shall be risked in saving mine,' she said, firmly; and indeed the few minutes which had remained for parley were soon over, and as each, by the strong instinct of self-preservation, sought some stay among the floating spars around, the last object they beheld was Helen's white dress and upturned countenance, as she sank, without a struggle, into the deep waters.

No matter how the boats careered landward, and the strong swimmers reached the shore with life. A trembling, grateful band uplifted their souls in praise and thanksgiving.

Helen's corse was washed to the beach with the next flow of the tide; that form which had enshrined, perhaps, a greater heart than dwelt among the rescued. Her action, her words had been repeated from mouth to mouth; and many were the tears shed around her — many the kisses pressed upon her pale cheek and

brow. Fanny Lawson flung herself beside the body in an attitude of worship ; and her husband's lip quivered with manly emotion. Even the child was made to kiss the dead, and a strange hope indulged that it might remember the scene. Francis Rayton had requested that he might look upon her remains — alone.

He entered the shaded chamber, where she lay in white garments ; her rich light hair, still dank from the ocean baptism, parted from the forehead, and reaching in long lines below her waist. Her countenance bore an expression of angelic serenity : and she looked young — oh, so much younger than when swayed by the hopes and the fears, and the passions of life ! On her finger still rested the emerald ring ; but next to her hand, and guarded *by* that precious memento, was Rayton's cameo, evidently in the death hour yet more dearly cherished. Rayton had not shed tears since boyhood, but as he gazed he burst into a passion of weeping ; then, when something like calmness was restored, he drew away the emerald, and placed it on his own finger. To the authorities he intimated that he would pay to her representatives any price which might be set upon it ; and requested that the cameo might not be removed from the dead. No one disputed his right to direct ; and by his order, a monument of white marble has been erected above that African grave, bearing the simple inscription :

‘ TO THE MEMORY OF A MOST NOBLE WOMAN.’

Rayton did not proceed to Calcutta in the same vessel which conveyed the remainder of the passengers ; it would seem, indeed, that he purposely avoided

their companionship. He returned to England as speedily as possible ; is still unmarried — immersed in politics and speculations. Once, when a most dear friend questioned him on his mode of life, he answered bitterly, quoting a line from Tennyson's passion-kindled poem :

‘ I myself must mix with Action, lest I wither by Despair.’

THE STORY OF A PICTURE.

IN the year eighteen hundred and something, Henry Cummins awoke one morning and discovered — what very much surprised ‘the world’ when they heard it, and almost astonished himself, namely — that he was penniless! In three years he had run through the savings of a life; for his father, a plodding man of business, had bequeathed above thirty thousand pounds to his only child, having previously given him what is called ‘a good education’ — a term which is, alas! too often a sad misnomer. What is commonly called a ‘good’ education, sometimes turns out to have been a very ‘bad’ one. Although a tradesman, old Mr. Cummins had an amiable weakness, (if weakness it must be called,) yclept family pride, and his anxious hope was, that Henry would resuscitate the honor of the family. Yes, he belonged to a family which had been renowned through several generations; but as, virtue and honor do not always fill the purse, and in this unromantic age it is found absolutely necessary to pay butchers and bakers, it was thought advisable for a younger branch of the genealogical tree to strike fresh root in the plebeian but extremely invigorating soil of trade. Mr. Cummins had been the

younger branch destined for this healthful process, and Henry had been intended for the bar, the father's dreams of course picturing him on the woolsack. But a lavish allowance for his pocket, and the gratification of every wish not absolutely vicious, while yet in his teens, were not precisely the means to render him a steady or a studious man. He was twenty when his father died, and he came into uncontrolled possession of his property a year afterwards; so, considering that he found it quite impossible the first year to live on four times the sum that his trustee allowed him, and that he did contrive, and not very mysteriously, to borrow some thousands during that period, it is not surprising that at the end of three years, as we have said before, he awoke one morning and found himself without a penny. He made other discoveries, too, at the same moment. He found, that, paying the price of his whole fortune, he had not, after all, purchased happiness; and when the first stunning sensation of extreme *unhappiness* and affliction which his different discoveries occasioned had a little abated, there sprang up in his mind a wonderful growth of good resolutions for the future, and some sort of inward assurance, which was better than all, that told him he had energy enough to carry them out.

But the question was, what first should be done? After a little while all visionary plans and speculations melted into the one strong sense of the necessity of selling at once horses and carriages, house, furniture, and every species of available property, with the proceeds of which he hoped to discharge debts still outstanding, and have perhaps a trifle to begin

the world with. Now, abstractedly, a chair is but a chair, a table but a table, yet every one will allow the power that even inanimate objects possess of twining themselves around the heart, until a final separation is absolutely painful. Henry Cummins was perfectly aware of this fact, as on the morning of the sale he walked through every room of his house, for the last time, among his household gods. There they were, every one ticketed, and standing uncomfortably forward, as if they had already taken leave of their master, and were inviting themselves to the notice of the strangers who walked through the rooms. Had the weather been dull and cloudy, nature would have seemed in unison with the spendthrift's feelings; but the sun streamed in most unsympathizingly, as if to mock his anguish, and (what perhaps he also observed) to throw a very unbecoming degree of light upon faded damask, cracked china, and tarnished gilding. It is possible that he might have given a rough guess at the different prices which might have been expected had a cloudy sky veiled such imperfections, yet it was not that which made his cravat feel something too tight, or produced the nervous twitches which might have been remarked about his mouth; for though tears—those exhalations of intense agony, a *man's* tears—did rise to his eyes, pride drove them back. It was very strange that his father's arm-chair, or his mother's work-table, should produce such emotions, and yet they oppressed his heart most strongly when he observed a stranger pause, with all the assurance in the world, to examine a certain old picture. Now, it chanced that this was about the only thing to which

the sunshine was favorable, for without streaming upon it, a flood of light nevertheless illumined the apartment, and, coming from the right direction, brought out beauties that might otherwise have remained unobserved.

It was, indeed, an exquisite painting — no matter by which of the old masters ; and it had belonged to the Cummins family for several generations. It was a landscape scene with figures ; the season bright gorgeous summer ; and the picture was among Henry Cummins' earliest recollections and associations. In the days of frocks and pinafores he had played before it, looking up sometimes, and almost wondering if the shadows would ever grow longer, or the knot of harvest people ever finish the day's labor. And in years later than those of frockhood, he had tried his daring hand in copying the great original, only, it must be confessed, to throw palette and brushes away in disgust ; and in recent times he had pointed out its beauties to admiring visitors, while it had been the silent witness of his follies — silent, surely, because he would not listen, for now to the mind's ear it spoke trumpet-tongued reproaches. There it hung, in its old fashioned frame, ticketed No. 27. Had that ticket supernatural powers ? — for verily, to the vision of Henry Cummins, the figures seemed starting to life, as they looked down sorrowfully and reproachfully at him. The stranger whose glance the picture had arrested, was a little old gentleman, dressed in brown, who held by the hand a beautiful girl of about twelve years old. The fairy-like child was soon satisfied with looking at the picture, and slipped her hand from that

of her grandfather, the better to observe a china monster, which had caught her attention ; and then the little old man drew out his spectacles, stepped somewhat nearer to the painting, and putting his arms behind his back, and clasping with one hand the wrist of the other, stood for full five minutes in a dream of delight. He was aroused from it by a joyous laugh of the child, for the grotesque image had been irresistible. The child's laugh grated on the heart of Henry Cummins almost as much as the bright sunshine had done ; and though he gazed at her full in the face, as she shook back the thick curls which shaded it, and besought ' grandpapa ' to buy the green and purple monster, he certainly did not perceive she was the most beautiful object in the room — if the truth must be told, he thought her a noisy, troublesome child.

The little old gentleman promised to buy the monster, and telling Julia that the sale would commence in half an hour, he led her down stairs, and put her into a carriage which was waiting, and which quickly drove off. All this Henry Cummins beheld from a window, though he could not hear what directions were given to the coachman. However, in another minute the little old gentleman had returned to the drawing-room, but he passed by the picture without noticing it again, and after giving rather an indifferent glance to some other objects, seated himself within a few paces of the auctioneer's desk. Henry Cummins wondered if he meant to bid for the picture, and felt almost decided to buy it in himself ; but he did not wish to make himself known to the auctioneer, and so determined to bid as a stranger. The sale began, and the china monster,

which was in the first page of the catalogue, was knocked down to the little old gentleman. It had been run up to a sum far beyond its value, for the purchaser had shown he was determined to have it. Perhaps he took a hint from this circumstance, or, perhaps he was in reality an experienced bidder, and had only from some accident been off his guard in a trifling matter; however this might be, when the picture was put up for sale the old gentleman's voice was not heard at all. It is true the auctioneer must have received, from time to time, telegraphic dispatches from somebody, as, without the bidders being always heard, 'going — going' — was followed by higher and higher offers. At last, as if himself out of patience, the auctioneer sharply let fall his mystical symbol, even before Henry Cummins could determine on an advance, and a nod of the head proclaimed that the picture belonged to the little old gentleman. He looked remarkably happy, for he would willingly have given hundreds for that which he had purchased for thirty-five pounds. Once more he approached the painting, gazing now with a sort of parental admiration; but this time Henry Cummins was at his elbow. A quick beating of the heart had superseded the thickness in his throat as the latter exclaimed — 'Sir, I will give you twenty pounds for your bargain!'

'Sir, I would not take fifty,' returned the other.

'What will you take?' rejoined Henry.

'Nothing you can offer. Sir, I mean to keep the picture;' and the old gentleman clasped his arms behind his back, in his favorite attitude of determination.

chest' contained gifts for this imaginary being — who, of course, would be worthy to be robed with the delicate filmy muslins of Dacca (fit for Titania and her court), or to move beneath the graceful folds of the soft and peerless Cashmere.

But we must return to the little old gentleman, mentioned long ago. Ten years seemed to have passed him by with a very slight and friendly greeting. There sat Sir James Howard, so very like his former self, that one might have fancied the suit of brown he wore was the identical apparel alluded to before ; perhaps a very keen observer might have remembered that, ten years ago, there were a few dark hairs amid the snow-drifts of time, whereas now all were white ; perhaps, too, his habitual stoop was a little more remarkable, and his hand (that great test of age) a little more wrinkled ; but the bright, intelligent, good countenance, seemed just the same as ever. His house was a short distance from London, and he sat in a favorite morning room, the walls of which were decorated with gems of art ; books, also, were there, not *too* formally arranged ; and the French windows opened into a flower-garden, admitting the summer breeze laden with sweets. A servant entered with the card of ' Mr. Henry Cummins,' and Sir James desiring him to be admitted, the stranger entered the room. Simultaneously with offering his apologies for intruding, the latter glanced round the apartment, while an anxious expression gathered upon his countenance.

' I fear, Sir James, I am scarcely remembered,' exclaimed Henry. And Sir James put his finger to his brow as if to invoke recollection, before he replied,

‘The name is familiar to me, though I cannot exactly tell how.’

‘You — you — Sir James, you purchased a picture that once belonged to me.’

‘You! Are you *that* Mr. Cummins?’ rejoined Sir James, eyeing his visitor from top to toe, with a look that plainly indicated he remembered Henry’s early career, and the circumstances which had led him to predicate that the ‘scapegrace’ must turn shoe-black.’ That could not have been the occupation of the gentlemanly, indeed distinguished-looking, person now before him; and Sir James recollecting, with the lightning flash of thought, every particular connected with the sale, gave a shrewd guess at the object of Henry Cummins’ visit, and — grew a little out of temper. Yes, as faithful historians, we must confess he felt cross; for, as the sun has spots, so the dear, good, little, old gentleman had one fault — he was, on particular subjects, of an irritable temper. The picture he still retained, and prized highly. Inclination was at war with the promptings of his own kind, warm, fresh, evergreen heart, and the more the former succumbed, the more peevish in manner did he grow.

It is almost needless to hint that the object of Henry Cummins’ visit was to regain it at any pecuniary sacrifice. He was a proud young man, and yet he bore the reproaches with meekness which Sir James could not help insinuating, and owned his errors frankly. ‘I can assure you, Sir James,’ he said, ‘when I sought for and accepted a situation in India from an old friend of my father, it was with the most anxious desire to redeem past errors — errors which, I may take leave

to say, were of the head, not of the heart; and in all my exertions in that distant field of enterprise, I was not less animated by repentant feeling than by the hope and belief of regaining the picture which fortune had made yours; in short, *that* picture has been the soul of my reformation. I am now blessed with the means of independence; and here, then, I appear with the wish to gain back the object of my long-cherished desires.'

Sir James was not unmoved by the ingenuous appeal; but he was inexorable. Henry, in some respect, felt himself to be ill-used; yet of what should he complain? Surely, a man has a right to retain the purchase he has lawfully made. Although continuing obdurate to all offers, Sir James had the condescension to ask his visitor to walk into the drawing-room to look at the picture. Henry followed, trembling; for while it was unredeemed, he felt the painting would gaze upon him like a reproving spirit. There it was, in the centre of one side of the room, and provided with a new and gorgeous frame; the light, too, was most favorable. What memories did it bring back to the spendthrift's mind! His mother's gentle touch, her loving kiss — his father's counsel — the voices of early friends — and the forms of all — and scenes of long, long ago — seemed vividly to pass before him. Like the buried cities which lay for centuries at the volcano's foot, so there are thoughts and feelings which rest entombed beneath, not destroyed by, the lava ashes of time and circumstances. To his heart and fancy the figures did not look at him reproachfully as he had expected them to do, but seemed to wear an

expression more of sorrow than of anger, and he felt that he would have given much to be alone with the picture for an hour, for Sir James stood by him, with his arms clasped behind as formerly, muttering audibly, 'No, I will never sell this picture.'

Poor Henry was summoning his courage for the leave-taking, and gazing like a lover at a mistress who could never be his, when a joyous laugh, evidently proceeding from the adjoining room, fell upon his ear; it jarred upon his spirits, and seemed almost as discordant as that he well remembered ten years before. The voice and laugh were peculiar, and he felt certain the tiresome child was near. Of course, a moment's thought convinced him that the child must be now a woman; but he felt almost sure she had red hair, had a strong impression that she squinted, and associated her as well, in some incongruous manner, with a laughing hyæna. One more appeal before he departed; it was this:—'Sir James, if I survive you, will you direct your executors to sell me the picture? or will you give me the power, in case I should die first, of willing it into my family, by any pecuniary arrangement with my heirs and yours which you may like to make?'

'Well, perhaps, it may be yours after my death.'

And so they parted.

Poor Henry Cummins returned to his hotel vexed and disappointed. He had taken the precaution of leaving his address with Sir James, in case the latter should change his mind, which did not, however, appear a very probable event. Out of spirits, and perhaps a little out of humor, the day dragged wearily

on. In the evening he strolled out for an hour, and bethought himself of walking down the street in which was his former home. The old house, which he had left bare and tenantless, was now lit up for a party; it seemed as if everything that day were destined to assume an uncongenial unsympathizing air; and he bent his steps homeward more desponding than ever. On his arrival he found a huge packing case in his apartment, and a note from Sir James Howard. The eccentric old gentleman kept his word—he did not *sell* the picture, he *gave* it to a reformed spendthrift! Yes, there it was, and in the old frame too. To be sure, some people might have hinted that the handsome one was reserved for another favorite, but they would have done Sir James injustice. He knew human nature well, and he knew that the kindly feeling displayed in the preservation and recollection even of an old picture-frame would not be lost on the heart of Henry Cummins.

Our space forbids us to describe minutely Henry Cummins' second visit to Sir James Howard; how the cheerful aspect of the different apartments failed now to oppress or deject him; or how even a certain laugh seemed musical. But the second visit was not the last, for the reformed spendthrift had won an eccentric but sincere and lasting friend. He was introduced to Julia, and assuredly there was nothing about her to recall his former unfavorable impression. Her eyes were as straight as his own, (and *they* were rather handsome ones,) but of the deep blue of a violet, and her hair of that sunny brown that even 'an enemy' would call auburn. They became intimate, and Henry grew to

delight in the rich voice and joyous laugh; and Julia had a heart, and could weep sometimes :

‘ For the heart which is soonest alive to the flowers,
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns.’

One day he sat beside her at the piano, and remarking (not for the first time) that her hands were whiter than the ivory, he bethought him of a certain diamond which was in the ‘black chest’ among other unset gems, and he was sure it could never find so fit a home as on one of those snowy fingers. It was presented — accepted; and as the chest was opened, he found, among other half-forgotten treasures, an ivory work-box, looking as if it belonged to her; there was room for her name on it, and he thought of having Julia Howard engraven, but he recollected she might marry, and so the blank space remained. In another week some other thought caused the black chest to be again inspected; but when he came to close it, the contents had been so much disturbed, that without removing an embroidered cashmere, the lid *would* remain obstinately gaping. He took out the cashmere, paused for a moment, smiled, as if some agreeable thought occurred for the first time — and — and Decca muslins, cashmeres, boxes, fans, card-cases, attar, chains, rings, unset diamonds, &c. &c., found but one mistress. In less than three months from that day, more pretty things than one were engraved — Julia Cummins. Thus were two of the ardent wishes of Henry Cummins accomplished, and the third was in his own power to fulfil. Although the career in India, which had blessed him with an ample fortune, had unfitted him to pursue the study of the law, he understood that

conduct sheds as much lustre on a family as the display of *talents* : *that* was in his power ; and if vanity is sometimes pained by the recollection of the name he might have won, he owns that the punishment is just, though, while he regrets the past, he feels gratefully happy that he has redeemed it. So true is it that ‘ there is a future to all who have the virtue to repent and the energy to atone.’

WORKING GENTLEWOMEN.

Most country houses — I mean those spacious and commodious dwellings which descend from generation to generation in the families of the wealthy classes — have their picture galleries ; and I scarcely know anything more suggestive of touching memories and dreamy speculations than the contemplation of the portraits they contain. One has generally some scanty knowledge of the names and histories of the originals, just enough to pique curiosity without satisfying it, and the mind insensibly wanders into the vague regions of fancy. Through this cloud-land, however, which bridges the past and the present, we soon pass ; and if we are inclined to take a common sense view of things in general, we shall arrive at many just conclusions, none the less just and true that we may be ignorant of actual details.

That stately dame who flourished in the days of the powdered peruke, black patch, and formidable farthingale — notwithstanding the most absurd dress which ever disfigured humanity — looks what she was, a devoted wife and affectionate mother. A certain softness in the eyes, and a few lines about the mouth,

predispose us to like her ; and we are not at all surprised to hear, that she could hardly be reckoned a woman of fashion in her dissipated day, for she went to court seldom, and neither gambled, nor disagreed with her husband. She was one of Napoleon's 'great women,' being the mother of a large family, six sons and five daughters. They all married, and some what the world calls 'badly.' The 'Hall' and lands passed to the oldest son, and are still owned by his descendant. The appanage for her younger children was but scanty ; the tide of fortune ebbed from some, and flowed towards others ; and the great-great-grandchildren of that stately lady are scattered over the world, removed from each other less—far less by mountains and oceans, than by the difference of their stations !

The destiny of Men rests so much on their own energy and abilities, that—subject to a few distressing exceptions—it may be taken as a rule, that they mount the wheel of fortune according as they possess those qualities : but Women are so differently constituted, that, when suddenly thrown into the vortex of the world to struggle for existence, they are often the most estimable who first sink in the conflict.

Among the startling contrasts which meet us at every turn of our social existence, I know not one more striking than the difference between the position of a young girl in the middle station of life, supported by her parents, enjoying all the pleasures and privileges of a home, yet toiling scarcely more than the 'lilies of the field,' and the condition of one, who, belonging to the same sphere, nurtured in the

same manner, educated on the same system, is compelled in the untried season of youth, in the blooming period of her existence, to encounter the frowns of the world, and wrest her daily bread from its iron grasp. Let us dwell on the two pictures for a little while, and try to exclude all cross lights of false sentiment, that would obscure our vision and warp our judgment.

I am afraid we must confess that the seeming happiness of the one is often less real than the calm of a lethargy, and less secure than the dwelling of him who builds on the smiling side of a volcano. Too many old 'school people' think that ignorance of evil, and indifference to the wide world beyond her own narrow circle, are the best palladium for a young woman's respectability and well-being; but even if they were so—which we do not allow—this protection could not last for ever; and the longer error and ignorance cling to us, the harder are they to part from, thus revenging truth and knowledge when we slight their precious teachings.

The end and aim of a girl's life is not, surely, to work Berlin slippers, play indifferently on the piano, sing out of tune, draw out a perspective, read bad novels (there can be no objection to good ones) over the fire in winter, and on the Ramsgate sands in summer; and to consider it an extreme point of usefulness to hem her brother's handkerchiefs, trim her own straw bonnet, and write, by 'Mamma's' directions, notes of invitation, when necessary.

Vaguely, much too vaguely for her to reason on, or describe her emotions, the young girl is conscious of

the fact, and would be less content were it not for the expectation of a future — this future being, almost invariably, Marriage. Very rational is this expectation, for by far the larger proportion of women do marry ; but destiny holds a few single ; and if a more enlightened system than generally prevails were pursued, the latter would have more resources in their loneliness, and wives would come to their new duties and new positions with infinite advantages. Injudicious marriages, too, would often be avoided ; a mind occupied with duties or pursuits that ennoble or expand it, is not very likely to be the slave of a sudden or unworthy passion ; and though it is doubtless very unromantic to say so, the most enduring attachments are certainly those which the reason and judgment approve.

The striking contrast to which I have alluded is that between the too often listless, half occupied existence of the ‘young lady,’ who chases *ennui* by a course of trifling pleasures, which very soon pall on superior natures, and, on the contrary, become to inferior ones a necessary of life — and the *too* responsible, too active, too energetic life of the gently-nurtured girl, whom adversity drives into the world to earn her own living in any of those positions which custom has made hard and false. The falseness or hardness of these positions is quite of modern growth. Two or three generations back, families of a certain standing — probably because they were much fewer in number than they are at the present day — had a kind of pride, a sort of remnant of past chivalry, which precluded the female members from undertaking any toil for which a pecuniary return was to be expected. It was thought

no obligation, no degradation, to receive eleemosynary aid from a distant kinsman, rather than submit to labor which a false pride called 'shameful.' Of course, to a certain extent, the same feeling prevails in the upper ranks of the middle classes at the present day; but it is much more circumscribed in its limits than it was formerly. People in excellent circumstances, moving in most intelligent and agreeable circles, belonging to different grades of the legal and medical professions, merchants, and many others, are not, consequently, pretenders, even to high birth, or endowed with these hereditary notions of family pride.

It is quite common to find the near female relatives of such persons fighting the battle of life on their own account, under disadvantages and discomforts that are all the harder to endure, because but little apparent to any, save the initiated.

Suppose a family of three;—the brother enters business early, and prospers to some degree in it; and the prettier of two sisters marries a year before her father's death,—just in time to be comfortably settled before the crash comes which flings her sister penniless on the world. For the father lived up to his income, and had neglected to insure his life. They two, who

——— 'Slept together,

Rose at one instant, learned, play'd, eat together,'

through the years of childhood and youth, are now parted in their destinies, like two plants, the one of which is sheltered in a hot-house, and tended with care, and the other left to trail on the bleak ground, and seek sustenance as it can, exposed to every biting

blast. If it weather the winter storms, it is true the latter may bear richer fruit, though not such showy blossoms as its favored fellow ; but that little word, *if* ! — what hopes and expectations in life hang upon it !

It would be unfair to blame the more fortunate sister, or impute to her want of kindness and affection ; she probably gives the other exactly the same sort of sympathy which would have been bestowed on herself, had their fortunes been reversed. Both brother and married sister have new ties, stronger and dearer than the old ones ; but they do what they can. There are bed and board until the forlorn one procures remunerative occupation, and whenever she may obtain a holiday, or be out of a situation ; little presents sometimes, when other claims have not squeezed the purse quite empty ; and more real interest in her well-being is expressed and shown, than, in all probability, she will find existing in the heart of any other human being. They will be lenient in their judgment of her faults, flattering in their opinion of her abilities, and ready to take her part when she is wrong ; everybody, be they just people, will defend us when we are right.

Far be it however, from me, in the picture I am attempting to sketch, to insinuate that there must, or should be, hardship in a gentlewoman exerting herself, by her mind or by her hands, as the means of an honorable and independent existence. On the contrary, there is a beautiful truth in the old Latin proverb that ‘*Labor is Worship* ;’ and we may depend upon it, that the struggling women of the nineteenth century are, with the rarest possible exceptions, far nobler

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beings than were the damsels of the olden time, who were themes for the troubadour's lays, and the victor's prize at the tilt and tournament. They ought to have the reward of this true nobility, in the world's honor and respect for their vocations, and in individual competence and happiness.

An error which often leads to much misery rests in the apathy and improvidence of parents, who are content to enjoy their daughters' society ; to indulge their own instinct — not principle — of benevolence, by bestowing on them many personal gratifications which enervate and disincline them from those habits of industry and activity of mind which would preserve them from *ennui* far more effectually than do evening parties, morning visits, or their endless variety of trifling employments ; — habits of occupation which would at the same time brace and enlarge the mind, and fit it for that encounter which is before them in the future.

The gentlewoman cast adrift on her own resources, usually, and very naturally, seeks to render her accomplishments and acquirements available by imparting them to others ; and according to their extent and solidity is she of course likely to be successful. But if she have not ' kept them up ' since her school-days ceased, with more than ordinary diligence, she will have a sad lesson to learn ; and ' keeping up ' really means progressing ; for there is no disguising the fact that systems of education are improving every day ; and what would have been thought in advance of the throng seven years ago, may be now decidedly in the rear. She will find the mother, or ' musical friend,' of the family she desires to instruct, a very different

critic from her brother's friends, who hung over the piano with gestures of delight, and vied with each other for the honor of turning over the leaves of her music-book ; her port-folio of drawings will be coldly and curiously scanned, and will not elicit any of the hyperbole compliments which similar productions had won, when they appeared in the albums of her acquaintances ; the accent of her French will be at best a disputed point ; and questions in grammar and geography will be asked her, which, under other circumstances, would be decidedly impertinent.

Perhaps what tends more than anything else to render the situation of a governess or teacher — becoming such under the circumstances I have indicated — peculiarly distressing, or at best unsatisfactory, is the fact, that after all her exertions, and with all her readiness to make necessary sacrifices, she is unable to compete with the young woman who has been educated for the express purpose of becoming an instructress, and to whom the position is sometimes a rise in life, looked forward to as a point of ambition. It is one thing to possess the knowledge and accomplishments which pass pleasantly current in society, and quite another to have the deep and thorough understanding of them necessary to impart instruction, or to have the habit and method of teaching.

When penury comes to a single woman in the middle station of life, it is to teaching that she almost invariably turns her attention ; and how fortunate does it prove, if, instead of having frittered away her time in senseless pleasures, she has strengthened her understanding and cultivated her mind in the past bright

years of beautiful leisure. Better still if she has cherished the kindly sympathies of her nature in the day of her seeming prosperity, and won the hearts of warm and loving friends to comfort her.

Many gentlewomen in London there are, who, without attempting to instruct, eke out an existence by various unsuspected means. Wood-engraving, we believe, is executed to some extent by ladies ; and many of the best specimen patterns of fancy-work come from their hands. It would be well if there were many more legitimate occupations open for them. Meanwhile, there are myriads of persons who have it in their power to ameliorate the condition of individuals among the 'working gentlewomen,' yet neglect to do so from sheer thoughtlessness. One of these, for instance, is the mother of young daughters, who proves inconsiderate and exacting towards their governess ; who does not reflect how oppressive must be the monotony of her life — how depressing the *perpetual* companionship of children, agreeable as a due proportion of it is to most persons ; who forgets how lonely she too often is in the bosom of a large family ; how the word 'home' is to her a mockery, the nearest faint resemblance to her of that reality being the midnight solitude of her fireless attic. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule of suffering, but I much fear they are too few.

If not tried too long — if sorrow has not broken their spirits and soured their tempers — struggling women ought to make the best wives in the world. A knowledge of life will be theirs no other teaching could have bestowed ; a habit of forbearance, too, and gratitude

for small kindnesses, which in the hour of proud prosperity would have been taken as a right. I sometimes speculate on the inner life, the heart's history of such women; too often, for their own peace, are they found clinging to a shadow, and losing the substance — worshipping a vision, and treating some genuine love with scorn. The hour of suffering — of penury, is the one that tests the true lover; and if it have not the power to draw from him whom she wishes to believe so, the acknowledgment which should bind her to him, the sooner she expels from its throne the creature of her imagination the better for her own peace.

MRS. SMITH AND MRS. BROWN.

A DOMESTIC DIALOGUE.

TIME — *Morning, July, 1851.*

SCENE — *No. 7, Victoria Terrace, near London.*

[Mrs. Smith having allowed her cook to go to the Exhibition, allows her housemaid to be generally busy in departments not usually pertaining to the 'neat-handed' Sarah; while Mrs. Smith herself, in morning dress, and remarkably pretty cap, dusts china ornaments in her 'own sweet little drawing-room,' pulls down Venetian blinds to spare her Axminster, and arranges softly and lovingly a few books on an ornamental table: but she loiters in a manner that a deputy-housemaid ought not to do, dipping into the lovely illustrated 'Evangeline' for full five minutes, still standing, but resting first on one side and then on the other, as little girls are always scolded for doing, and dropping into a chair, when in the dusting she glances at a page of the 'Casa Guidi Windows,' that had not struck her with its full force before. A patter of little feet is heard; the book is closed, and enter Susan the nurse-maid, equipped for walking with Master Willy and Miss Katey, aged respectively four and two years. Bright eyes, soft rosy cheeks, silken, curly locks, streaming beneath large sun-shading Leghorn hats; short full skirts, and little Katey's coquettish cazaweck, and snowy-white socks and coal-black polished leather shoes, must be shown to paint their picture. Several demonstrative hugs between mother and children, somewhat to the detriment of Mrs. Smith's cap, are accompanied by crowing laughter. — 'Dood-by, mamma; dood-by! Tusan take us to see the swam; and such a nice walk! Dood-by!' And the four impatient little feet scamper away; Mrs. Smith, watching them out of the gate, as she peers between the bars of the blind. Then with a sudden thought she unrolls some new music, opens the piano, and with the manner of a brilliant player when trying a strange piece, repeats one or two 'queer' passages three or four times. A sharp double knock is heard, and the busy Sarah shows in Mrs. Brown: civil neighborly greetings ensue.]

Mrs. Brown. I heard the piano going, and so judged you would see me, though it is hardly ten o'clock ; but neighbors ought to be neighborly ; and as I said to Mr. Brown, I was sure if you could help me you would.

Mrs. Smith. I am sure anything I can do—

Mrs. B. Oh, what a difference. [*Looking round with envious admiration.*] You can sit down in comfort to music the first thing in the morning.

Mrs. S. It is not my usual time for playing, but my husband brought me home some new quadrilles and a polka last night ; and as we are going to a little carpet dance to-night, where I may be useful, I thought I would try them over. But what is it that I can do for you, Mrs. Brown ?

Mrs. B. [*Sighing.*] My dear, you are a young wife — not married above five or six years — and you have had the luck to have *treasures* (trebly italicised) ; but as for me, servants are my torments. I sent off the whole pack last night, and have only a horrid charwoman in the house. Does your cook know of any friend she can recommend ? That is what I wanted to ask you.

Mrs. S. I hardly think it likely, but I will ask Sarah if she knows any one. Cook is not at home ; she is gone to the Exhibition.

Mrs. B. What, again ! Then it was she that I saw so smart getting into the omnibus. Well, I must say you spoil them.

Mrs. S. [*Smiling.*] And yet I get on remarkably well. It is Cook's third visit. I actually sent her to-day because she had neglected to go over the Model Lodging Houses, and I wished her so much to see them.

Mrs. B. My dear Mrs. Smith, what could it signify ?

Mrs. S. A good deal, I think. However, I do not wonder at the omission, as I believe on the first occasion she had no eyes for anything except the kitchen-ranges ; her account of which interested me particularly. I know, with all my Friday and Saturday visits, I have not found them out yet.

Mrs. B. Is it possible you talk to your servants in this way ?

Mrs. S. Why not ? I assure you we always consider our servants as humble friends, and interest ourselves in all that concerns them.

Mrs. B. But you wouldn't if you had such wretches as I have to deal with. Why, in eight months I have had five cooks, three house-maids, and four little imps in buttons : they have nearly broken my heart, and quite made differences between Mr. Brown and me ; and it has been so all my life. Oh, Mrs. Smith, how do you manage ; and where did you get your servants from ?

Mrs. S. I hardly remember how I procured them ; through some ordinary channel of recommendation, I believe ; and I know I received excellent characters, which experience has convinced me they deserved. In fact, I would not engage a servant unless her appearance, acquirements, and general recommendation were an earnest that she would suit. Then, when one has a good servant, kindness and consideration, with fair wages, will always keep her. In fact, I believe kindness is thought more of than wages by many ; though we are of opinion that servants ought to receive good wages — enough to lay by for their old age.

Mrs. B. But they never do. It all goes in finery, and that is what I will not allow; it was a quarrel about a bonnet ribbon that made me part with Mary at last. I put up with her impudence for four months, but couldn't endure it any longer.

Mrs. S. Certain limits are no doubt desirable; but a thoroughly good and *happy* servant usually saves from her wages, and generally has sense enough not to dress absurdly. I do not care how *good* my servants' clothes are, both for the sake of their appearance and for economy, knowing well that cheap things are always the dearest in the end.

Mrs. B. [*Shaking her head with the wisdom of forty-five addressing the inexperience of twenty-eight.*] I see we shall never agree. I don't know what the world is coming to. Now there's the postman, I should not wonder if there are letters for the kitchen as well as for you.

Mrs. S. Very likely, for the servants have all relations in the country.

Enter SARAH, with a letter for Mrs. SMITH, and another in her hand.

Mrs. B. [*To Mrs. Smith.*] May I ask her?

Mrs. S. I was just going to do so. [*To the housemaid.*] Sarah, Mrs. Brown wants a cook, do you know of one?

Sarah. I think I do. [*Hesitates and stammers.*] That is, no, I am afraid the young person I was thinking of, would not suit you, ma'am.

Mrs. B. Not suit me, Sarah? What do you mean? Is she honest, clean, sober? A good cook?

Sarah. [*Indignant for her friend.*] Oh, yes, ma'am, but — but perhaps she would not do.

Mrs. B. Why not?

Sarah. You see, ma'am, it would be such a dreadful thing if she didn't suit, to lose a five years' character, and only leaving because her master has lost money, and is reducing his establishment; and she wants to stay with half wages, only he won't let her, and so she is teaching the eldest daughter to know about cooking; and so, ma'am, she couldn't leave yet, and of course you couldn't wait. No, I don't know any servant I am sure that I should like to recommend.

Mrs. B. [*With a half glimmer that Sarah does know of a 'treasure,' but won't consign her to No. 5.*] Oh, very well, I don't wish it to be considered a favor.

Sarah. Of course not, ma'am.

[*Sarah courtesys, and leaves the room.*]

Mrs. S. [*Almost timidly.*] If it would not be considered presumptuous in me, so much younger a housekeeper, to give advice, I would say to you, when you can succeed in procuring good servants, to try the plan of treating them indulgently. They are our fellow-creatures — with the same hopes and desires, failings and weaknesses, and infirmities of temper — we must not expect perfection — and if we show them *sympathy*, it is astonishing the influence —

Mrs. B. [*Decidedly tartly.*] Now I know what you are going to say; but I never will give in to those new-fangled notions. I won't allow followers, and I won't allow letter scribbling; and what I say in my own house shall be done, and I won't be answered by a minx; and if I choose a thing to be done one way one day,

and another way another, what's that to them? What business have they to say that I don't know my own mind, and begin to cry, and to talk about their characters?

Mrs. S. [*A little warmly.*] Oh, Mrs. Brown, anger often terrifies a timid girl, not naturally dull, into seeming stupidity and obstinacy. I pity them from my heart; and I deeply feel a mistress has grave responsibilities towards her female servants. Servitude at best is an abandonment of liberty, and must bring many trials; how cruel of us to make it needlessly bitter by our caprices and exactions. And on the other hand, what a happiness it is to feel oneself served from affection as well as duty. I speak from experience: our household is a household of love; these walls have never echoed to an angry reproof — there is no fear, there is no deception in the house; and I believe our servants feel it to be their *home*; it always gladdens me when I hear them call it so.

Mrs. B. It is all very fine, but how do you know that you are not cheated?

Mrs. S. From many circumstances, besides my own faith in those about me. I give you one for example: I know that our expenses are nearly a hundred a year less than those of many friends who appear to live more plainly. But all in the house draw together to avoid waste, and all act without separate interests. The servants themselves are like sisters, and help one another — as is the case to-day — in affectionate fellowship. If I give one of them a holiday, I scarcely know the difference in the house. I know people say I have been particularly 'fortunate;' but

is it not strange, dear Mrs. Brown, that one person should have all the bad servants, and another all the good?

Mrs. B. Not at all, if you give them high wages, and let them have their own way.

Mrs. S. Not their own way unless it is my way also. I assure you I am extremely particular, but then we are also very regular in our habits; and knowing myself that I dearly like to be praised when I do well, why I give praise to those about me when they deserve it.

Mrs. B. [*Rising and with a Burleigh shake of the head.*] They won't bear it.

Mrs. S. Oh, yes, they will — do *try* just for three months, with your next set of servants. But don't go yet; here come the 'trots' from their walk — you must see them.

[Enter Susan and the children; the latter laden with hedge-flowers. Mrs. Brown admires and caresses the children, whom Susan, at her mistress's bidding, has left in the drawing-room. Mrs. Brown says something about 'spolling,' which Katey does not understand, though she opens her large eyes still wider, as if in the effort to comprehend. Kitchens in Victoria-terraces not being very remote from drawing-rooms, a sound of bitter violent weeping is heard proceeding from the lower regions. Mrs. Smith rushes to the stairs to ask what is the matter; Mrs. Brown following in charge of the children.]

Sarah. [*Sympathetic, with her apron corner to her eye.*] Oh, Ma'am, poor Susan has got a letter from home, and her sister that's been ill so long — that was in the hospital for months — is dying; the doctors say she can't live three days.

Mrs. S. [*Going into the kitchen.*] Oh, I am so sorry. Is it the poor girl that had the 'housemaid's knee' from that hard place?

Sarah. Yes, Ma'am ; the brutes that kept her scrubbing from morning till night ; I wonder they can't be hung for murder.

Mrs. S. Hush, Sarah ; it will do no good to reproach them more. No doubt they have learned a lesson from their severity, and will regret it as long as they live. [*To Susan: putting her hand kindly on her shoulder.*] My poor girl, what can I do to comfort you ?

Susan. [*Sobbing violently.*] Oh, Ma'am, she do so fret to see me once more ! There's — only — a — a year between us ; and we came up to London together.

Mrs. Smith. Then go to her, of course, by all means.

Susan. [*Sobbing still, and kissing one of Mrs. Smith's hands.*] Oh, Ma'am, I was afraid — Cook — being out — you couldn't let me ; and if I don't go to-day I may never see her — again — Oh, Ma'am — bless you ! — bless you ! — Ma'am. No one ever had such a mistress.

Mrs. S. Hush, my poor girl ; try to be calm — she may recover still — doctors often make mistakes — and if not, remember it is the will of God — and think how much your poor sister suffered. Sarah, fetch her a glass of wine, and then look for Bradshaw — it is in the breakfast room — that we may see when the next train to Reading goes. That is the one she wants, is it not ?

[Exit Sarah, who returns with Bradshaw and a glass of wine. Susan revives a little. Bradshaw declares there is a mixed train 1 h. 55 m. ; Mrs. Smith observes there is only just time to arrange, as there is a long omnibus ride to the station. Susan shakes her head at the mention of dinner, and Mrs. Smith

suggests to Sarah a packet of sandwiches to put into the traveller's bag. Willy and Katey promise to be very good with dear mamma, and kiss 'poor' Susan — little lips trembling with the ready tears.]

SUPPLEMENTARY SCENE — No. 5, *Mr. and Mrs. Brown, anathematizing mutton-chops cocked (!) by charwoman.*

Mr. Brown. [*Crossly.*] Mrs. B., as my mother, who was a Norfolk woman, used to say, 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating;' and I do maintain Smith's is the pleasantest house I know to go to; *he* never sit down to a dinner of fat and cinders I know — and what does it signify if she spoils the servants, and if she gets the best sort of work out of them nevertheless. I never saw plate so polished — and *they've* no man. As for the spring-soup, the other day, it was fit for an alderman; and in the winter, that venison I shall never forget — why can't *we* have hot-water plates I should like to know?

Mrs. B. Brown, you are quite a brute to talk of such things at such a time — when you know I am almost frantic.

Mr. B. I am not a brute; but this I do say, that the *young* wives seem to me in the main the best managers.

Mrs. B. You had better bury me — I shall soon be worried into my grave — and then you can have a young wife.

Mr. B. Don't talk like an old fool. Hang it — it is enough to make a man savage — scold, scold, scold — change, change, change.

Mrs. B. [*Weeping.*] Because I get hold of a parcel of wretches, and Mrs. Smith has treasures.

Mr. B. I fancy she helps to make them treasures;

and it isn't as if she could be very active in the house herself — I am sure she isn't ; such a charming accomplished woman — the life and ornament of society and as pretty ——

[Mrs. Brown bursts into a fit of hysterics. Mr. Brown acknowledges he is a brute, calls her 'darling,' and 'dear Nancy,' and the scene closes on mutual flatteries and condolence, Mr. B. promising never to set up Mrs. Smith as a pattern again.]

THE MERCHANT'S CLERK.

'One touch of Nature makes the whole world kin.'

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was nothing in the appearance of Godfrey Grey that at the first glance distinguished him from the thousands of men who are to be met every morning in the great thoroughfares of London, wending their way city-wards to commence their daily duties — merchants' and bankers' clerks; earners of small salaries in government offices; or the infinite variety of busy individuals who compose an important stratum in social life. Neither tall nor short, neither handsome nor ugly, neither well dressed nor exactly shabby, and neither talkative nor morosely silent, Godfrey Grey was seldom noticed by strangers, and not much regarded by mere acquaintances. The latter considered him an ordinary specimen of humanity, and perhaps one of the last in the world to whom they would have attached heroism of character or romantic interest.

Those who knew him a little better — some of his fellow clerks for instance — called him a 'good soul' and 'an excellent fellow,' though occasionally this

commendation was accompanied by the expletive 'poor' applied to his name. Yet, if as applied to worldly means, they only are rich who live within their incomes, 'poor Godfrey,' or 'poor Grey,' was a sad misnomer. At fifty-five years of age, after forty years of toil, Godfrey had some fifty pounds in one of the suburban savings' banks — he had never owed any man a penny he could not pay, and had never incurred a pecuniary obligation, save once, and that was in a season of sickness, and sorrow, and death, when his household gods lay shivered at his feet. For the Lares and Penates hover, invisible spirits, about a poor man's hearth as well as near a rich one's; nay, they sometimes cling there with a yet firmer hold. For all this, Godfrey Grey was a bachelor.

Young men of spirit who 'dare do all that may become a man,' and — a little more, are very apt to say 'poor fellow' of an elder who evidently has not pushed his fortune in the world as they confidently intend to do, and who yet maintains cheerfulness and serenity in a condition of life under which they tell you they would certainly 'hang themselves;' this being an allegorical figure of speech not necessarily alarming. Consequently, some of the juniors in the counting-house of Messrs. Stavers and Co. often said 'poor Grey!' — youths who were not born when Godfrey first took his seat on a high stool there; young men of good connections, who undertook light work for no salary, just to see the routine of business among merchant princes.

Some points in the character of Mr. Stavers, the managing partner, will be developed by this little his-

tory. He was a tall, portly person, of few words and reserved manners ; his clear iron-grey eyes were as cold in their expression as polished steel ; and he never shook hands, he only placed his hand for a second in the extended palm of an intimate, and then as if the action were something necessary but disagreeable, which must be got over. Nobody ever mentioned 'Dombey' in his presence ; by mutual, though unexpressed consent, the whole world of his acquaintances avoided the topic even while the work was in course of publication, and the timid among them, whom the great man completely overawed, would have thought an allusion to bad watches or an Egyptian queen verging on the personal.

And yet there were some essentials in which Mr. Stavers was far from being a Dombey. He had loved the wife of his youth with generous and entire devotion ; he had lost her after a happy union of a very few years, and then his whole affections had centred in the only daughter — the sole child that she had left him. Who would have thought — for few were they who knew — that the proud merchant, so erect of figure and cold of speech, had watched for many a weary night by infancy's sick bed, and been to his little Mary a soft and gentle nurse ? Who would have thought — and none there were who knew — that this stately man had made himself the playmate of his little daughter in the early days of her childhood, had tossed her ball, and dressed her doll ? Who could have thought all this ? For of latter years the habit of his reserve — all habits strengthen by indulgence — had grown so strong, that it was less and less abandoned in

his home. Mary Stavers loved her father, but she also stood in awe of him ; and in the years of her opening womanhood made no just measurement of his parental affection.

But though Godfrey Grey was a bachelor, there was a Past belonging to his life that still, by the silver links of affection, had a hold on the Present, and swayed his actions, and directed his hopes not less absolutely than the rich merchant was influenced by care and thought for his daughter. Yet to understand all this, the reader must dream a waking dream, and must look on the pictures I will strive to rapidly sketch, as if they were phantoms floating across the surface of one of those fabled mirrors that reflected the forms of the dead and absent, and the scenes of long — long ago.

Look ! — there is a slight mist, but it will clear away soon. We cannot on the instant shut out the present, and bring to the mind's eye these pictures of the past. Yes, that young man is Godfrey Grey — what a difference ! True, the difference made by thirty years of chequered life ! But at five-and-twenty he journeyed to and from the counting-house just as he does at present, only the way was different. Then he threaded narrow streets that have long since made way for broad thoroughfares ; and in the home of his youth, number something in a suburban terrace, a narrow red-brick house, with green outside window-shutters, has been pulled down, and the site occupied by a railway terminus. London streets were not so crowded as now we find them ; shops were less showy, and dress less becoming than at present ; the rapid, rattling omnibus was not created, and lumbering hackney-coaches, with

drowsy drivers and worn-out horses, dragged along the highways.

Let us enter the red-brick house, with the outside shutters blistered by the summer sun, and battered by the winter rain. It has what we of another generation call an old-fashioned look, and we don't associate it with young people. And yet young people did dwell in those old-fashioned houses ! There is a Pembroke table in the middle of the room covered with a yellowish-green baize ; the remnant of a Turkey carpet, made for a much larger room, partially covers the floor ; heavy moreen curtains shade the windows ; a portrait of Godfrey's father, set in a black frame, hangs over the tall chimney-piece ; beneath which, bright bars and a polished stove look coldly suggestive of terrible task-work to the maid-of-all-work ; a hard horse-hair sofa occupies one side of the room, and its smoothness remains undisturbed ; for Godfrey's mother belongs to the ' old school,' scorns easy chairs herself, sits erect as a ramrod, and thinks it dreadful for young people to ' loll.' No wonder ! in those days only the strong lived.

Godfrey had a sister, his junior by a year or two. And Godfrey's sister had a friend. And so it came to pass that often and often two blooming girls sat and worked, and laughed and talked, and sang snatches of old ballads, in that dim cheerless room. Perhaps, too, their youth and gaiety shed a pleasantness about the scene not easy to realize now. Their bird-like snatches of song were without instrumental accompaniment, for in those days girls in their station of life were not taught music.

Godfrey's father had held an unimportant situation in a Government office. The patron to whom he owed it died soon after the appointment, and henceforth, being without influence, his onward steps were few and far between. But he lived economically, brought up his two children with credit, and left a few hundreds behind him, the greater part of which was sunk, at the imperative desire of Godfrey and Esther, in a life annuity for the widow. Godfrey, as we know, was a merchant's clerk; and his sister earned pocket-money by her needle. In those days there were many handicrafts in vogue which are now little pursued. Lace mending and darning of various rich fabrics were among them; for machinery had not then disseminated good taste; and the beautiful in dress was so costly, that even the very wealthy were glad to find keen eyes and skilful fingers ready to repair accidental injuries. It was very trying to the eyesight, this darning of fine cashmere and curious restoration of damaged lace; and before she was five-and-twenty, Esther Grey used spectacles of high magnifying power. But many things happened before that time, which probably seemed of more importance than the dimness of sight of which she complained.

The name of her friend was Mary Douglas; a pretty, light-hearted, fairy creature, that even when out of her teens seemed more of a child than a woman. Like Esther, she was an only daughter, and the bond of affectionate sympathy between them was almost sisterly. They were not alike, yet the different points of their character resembled those discords in music which are resolved into harmony. Esther was sedate, and

Mary almost giddy ; Esther was industrious, and Mary very nearly idle ; and yet her idleness did not seem what it was — somehow or other it seemed natural for her to be quite unemployed, or at most to be winding silk and thread for Esther's use. Even this she did ill, being too impatient to disentangle knots, or overcome a difficulty. But perhaps she was singing like a thrush all the time, or telling some merry story, laughing, or it might be crying if something pitiful had happened — and no one ever had the heart to rebuke her.

Godfrey Grey loved Mary Douglas ! A whole history is told in that brief sentence ; and all that followed was but natural to his character. He loved her intensely ; worshipped her as man does not often do — unselfishly ; but though he watched every look, every word, every gesture, he had not the vanity to construe the familiar friendship she evinced for ' Esther's brother ' into a warmer sentiment. He was quite right, and she did not even suspect the life-long affection she had kindled. He was shy, reserved, believing her to be like a queen above him, happy only to bask in her presence sometimes, and fearful too bold a word would frighten her from the house.

One autumn evening Godfrey returned home as usual. The mother sat knitting mid-way between the window and the cold bright grate. It was a chilly night, but Mrs. Grey, belonging to the old school, never had fires till some particular day, which had not arrived yet. Esther was wrapped in a shawl, plying her needle diligently. The wind sighed and surged through the neighboring trees, and rattled their dead leaves on the ground ; everything had a gloomy aspect, and

Godfrey felt a presentiment of evil. Esther was more silent than usual, but a smile seemed struggling to break from her pursed-up lips; she had a secret, and while she hugged it, longed to tell it.

Godfrey was set to guess the riddle, with the 'What do you think?' and 'Who do you think?' which are so tiresome and tantalizing. He could not guess, but Esther exclaimed at last, 'Well, then, Mary is going to be married! Are you not surprised?'

'Yes — oh, no — why surprised?' said Godfrey, very calmly, and sipping his tea as he spoke. It was quite twilight, almost the dusk of a cloudy evening. Presently he left the room, and not returning for an hour, Esther sought her brother; she found him on his bed; he said his head ached dreadfully, but her sisterly tenderness brought large tears to his eyes, and her womanly instinct leaped at something near the truth.

'Mary! — my poor brother!' This was nearly all she said; but Godfrey knew that her heart bled for him.

It was a long interview, and Godfrey's last words as she left him, were 'Esther, through life, not a word of this to her, to any one.'

And so Mary Douglas married her handsome, high-spirited lover; and her father — it was a year before his death — gave her away; and everybody thought she had made a 'great match.' They lived in a dashing style; yet one day her husband died, leaving Mary a pennyless widow with a little orphan girl.

What changes ten years make in the small world of a social circle! Old Mrs. Grey was dead, and her little income lost; Godfrey was beginning to look a

middle-aged man—white hairs were thickly strewn among his brown locks, and he stooped perceptibly; and Esther—poor Esther!—was almost blind. She could not work, she could not read, and she never sang now. The merry heart of careless youth was gone for ever; and if she were a little fractious now and then, Godfrey remembered her affliction, and bore with her.

Mary, the idolized Mary, was penniless; there was but one thing to be done, and Godfrey's little hoard was placed at her disposal. Mary had all her life been cared for by others, and it did not seem strange for her friends to help her now. And yet the canker was eating into her very life; she had loved her husband dearly, and mourned him in anguish of spirit; and the fall from seeming affluence to poverty shook her mind, and shattered her mortal frame. She only lived a year, and it was the most natural thing in the world for the child—a little Mary, too—to be adopted by the old maid and the old bachelor.

They reared her lovingly; debarred themselves of all luxuries and many comforts, that she might be tenderly nurtured; made her the pivot of their affections, and the load-star of their hopes. At eighteen, she eloped from their roof to wed almost a stranger, a boy scarcely older than herself, and to encounter, as they soon discovered, the struggles and perils of poverty. The blow broke Esther's heart, though she lingered for months on a sick bed before death released her from a world that now seemed doubly dark to the blind woman. She lived to know that the 'child' was already pinched by penury, was already accepting

alms like a beggar from the poor bereaved Godfrey. It was now indeed that his household gods lay shivered, and that the depth of woe was known.

These are the scenes that float, disturbed and indistinctly, athwart the magic mirror of the past. A breath — a will — and the daylight of present reality shines in — and we have Godfrey Grey, the elderly clerk, the ‘good soul’ of his acquaintances, trudging to and from his desolate two rooms to the counting-house, fulfilling his duties with clock-like regularity, though with something more than automaton skill.

CHAPTER II.

GODFREY sat on his high stool as usual; he was busy adding up, and subtracting from, and poring over, long rows of figures; nevertheless he had looked up three times at the clock over the chimney-piece, and compared its face once with that of his own antique silver watch. The hands only varied half a minute; it was nearly noon, and Mr. Stavers had not made his appearance, or sent to account for his absence. The case was unprecedented; a heap of unopened letters remained on the table in Mr. Stavers’ private room, and, from the post-marks of two or three, the chief clerks knew they required prompt attention. Besides, several matters were at a stand-still, for Mr. Stavers was an indefatigable man of business, and on the rare occasions of his absence always made methodical arrangements, deputing some little authority to one

or more of the clerks, who, however, never dreamed of exercising it without a formal bestowal of this occasional regency, not even on an emergency like the present.

A council was held, at which it was decided that if Mr. Stavers did not appear by one o'clock, Grey should take a cab and drive as fast as possible, with the letters, to the great man's residence in Portman Square — extreme expedition being desirable, lest Mr. Stavers and his clerk should cross on the road. Godfrey knew the house well, for on more than one occasion of illness he had been the bearer of dispatches. Arrived there he discharged the cab, and with his own hand gave a modest knock at the door.

The street-door of a large house seldom opens quite so fast to a modest knock as to the *crescendo* rat-a-tat-tat of a practised footman; but on that morning Godfrey Grey had to repeat his knock, and was on the point of lifting his hand a third time, when at last the lock gave way. It was a maid-servant who opened the door — an unusual circumstance; and at a glance the visitor perceived that something out of the customary routine must have happened. There was an appearance of disarray even about the entrance-hall, the oaken chairs of which, instead of being primly arranged, were drawn edgeways out of their places, as if hustled about by hurried passing to and fro. It was not even a housemaid, but that servants' drudge, the kitchen-maid, who opened the door, a country girl with a strong provincial accent, and who could or would only say 'No, he aint,' to the inquiry if Mr. Stavers were at home, and 'I doan't know' to the question if

he were well. Presently, however, Godfrey bethought himself to ask for the housekeeper, it being evident that no men-servants were about the premises, and in a few minutes an old servant of the family made her appearance dressed in the orthodox black silk of a 'housekeeper,' carrying her spectacles in one hand and a pocket handkerchief in the other; but it was the latter that she raised to her eyes, as she motioned Godfrey Grey into the breakfast parlor, where the remains of the morning meal were still on the table.

Yes, there was the urn that hissed no longer; the cup of coffee only half empty; a knife upon the floor; a fork plunged in the untasted perigord pie upon his plate; the arm-chair pushed back; — all showing at a glance that Mr. Stavers had left his just-tasted breakfast hastily. But there was one cup unused, one napkin unfolded, one plate unsoiled; and these proclaimed that the daughter had not joined her father at the unfinished meal.

'Oh, Sir! — oh, Mr. Grey!' exclaimed the weeping matron, 'I don't wonder at your coming; and I don't wonder at my poor master never once thinking of business. Bless you! he's half way to Scotland by this time, almost; he took an express —' but here tears prevented the good woman from proceeding.

'Express! Scotland!' ejaculated the astonished clerk.

'Yes,' sobbed the housekeeper, 'Gretna Green, Miss Mary has eloped!'

Godfrey sank into a chair, for he could no longer stand. The green wound of his own sorrow, the keen memory of all he had felt when *his* Mary — the very

name even affected him — had left her humble home at the stranger's bidding, flashed through his soul, and showed him the life-drama just as it had been acted. And something more ; for he not only recognised the outward action, — how the father, not seeing his child at breakfast, had summoned her and found her fled, — but Godfrey Grey could understand, throb for throb, all the anguish of that father's heart.

The housekeeper, worthy soul ! who had nursed Mary Stavers on her knee, and loved her as old servants almost always love the children they have seen grow up, gave the outlines of the dark tale very briefly. By the aid of her French maid, who was also missing, the young lady must have left her father's house either late the preceding night or early that morning. Mistress and maid had both apparently retired for the night, but neither of their beds had been slept in. As the worthless Annette's only duty was to attend on her young mistress, her not being about the house early in the morning had not attracted the smallest attention. The probability was they had quitted London some hours before their flight was discovered ; and from a letter left on the toilet-table, it was acknowledged for what purpose, and with whom — to wed a dashing young officer, whose sole means consisted of a lieutenant's pay !

'If you had but seen my poor master !' repeated the housekeeper. 'Oh, it almost broke my heart to see the large tears rolling down his poor face, which was as white as that table-cloth. To think of Mr. Stavers weeping ! But nobody can tell how much he felt.'

‘I can,’ said Godfrey, in a low sad tone. ‘I can, from my heart.’

‘And there is something,’ continued the worthy woman, ‘that is distressing me very much indeed. Master has taken his old servant Smith with him, but there’s a jackanapes of a young footman, who is to leave next week, and out of a spite I am almost sure he is going to send an account of the elopement to the newspapers, if he has not done so already, for he was writing for the best part of an hour, and then went out, as full of importance as he was the day he put on his new livery.’

‘This must be stopped!’ exclaimed Godfrey, with decision.

‘Ah, but how?’

‘By terrifying him — by bribing him — by knocking his brains out,’ returned Godfrey, in a passion of wrath; ‘the villain!’

‘Well, Mr. Grey, I only hope you will be able to persuade him. I have almost been down upon my knees to him, but he only laughs. Mind you, he don’t own what he has been doing; but I know. And he don’t care for his character, as he is going to turn play-actor.’

‘Where can I find him — when will he be in?’ asked Godfrey, impatiently.

‘To dinner — leave him alone for that; I am sure he will be home in another quarter of an hour. Indeed he may be in already. I’ll go and see.’

While she was absent, Godfrey Grey walked into the hall, and after deliberately examining some sticks which leaned together in a stand, selected one, switch-

ing it, as he returned to the breakfast-room, with as much freedom as if it had been his own.

The young knave had returned, and, quite unconscious of the purpose for which he was summoned up stairs, he made his appearance before Godfrey Grey, who taxed him with his offence in a tone of voice and in a manner that showed this was not a time for trifling. Meanwhile, the housekeeper saw the stick, and saw that Godfrey's pale face was set to a purpose of determination, and not liking to be the witness of a scene, she withdrew ; first, however, taking up the knives and forks from the breakfast-table, in the most quiet and natural manner in the world, as if she were innocent of a thought beyond their purification. In about five minutes a noisy scuffle was heard, which surprised her less than it did the other women servants, accompanied by cries of ' Help ! help ! — murder ! '

The women, in a party of three strong, entered the breakfast-room, where they found the young would-be Roscius in the grasp of Godfrey Grey, whose knuckles, pressed upon his throat, half-stifled his cries, which now were changed to ' I will — I will — let go ! '

' I will,' he repeated, when lightly held at arm's length by Grey, whose excitement seemed to have lent him additional strength, ' I will ; ' but the now craven youth added, ' you must give me the two sovereigns you promised just now.'

' Very well,' said Godfrey, ' and perhaps this good lady will take charge of them until we know it is not too late for you to undo the mischief.'

As he spoke, he put the money into the housekeeper's hand, adding, ' Will you be so good as to

send for a cab, that I may take this rascal with me to the newspaper offices, and get back the precious paragraphs he has left there.'

And this was done, partly by Godfrey's simple statement, partly by the culprit's forced confession that only a tithe he had written was true. His guilty conscience and imaginative temperament had pictured Godfrey Grey as a police officer in plain clothes, a mistake which neither he nor the worthy housekeeper took the trouble of correcting. He came back for the promised bribe, which was honorably bestowed; the housekeeper paid his arrears of wages; and then he slunk out of the house, bag and baggage, with yet a theatrical air that showed him to be not altogether unfit for the low villains of melo-dramatic performances.

CHAPTER III.

A WEEK had passed, and Mr. Stavers was again to be found in the quiet back room of his counting-house. The morning following the day of his unexpected absence, the clerks had received a letter from him, bearing the post-mark of a town in the north of England giving ample instructions for the conduct of the business; and when he returned, he made only the slightest possible allusion to his having left town. He had bowed coldly as he passed through the outer offices, and every one had observed the ravages one little week had made. He looked as if he had not slept all the while he had been away.

‘Will you tell Mr. Grey that I wish to see him?’ said Mr. Stavers, addressing one of the clerks, with whom he had just been conversing on business; and obedient to the summons, Godfrey entered the private room.

‘Be seated,’ said the great man, with more urbanity than was usual to his manner, and pointing to a chair near his own; and Godfrey, obeying his behest, remained silent during a pause that was long enough to be awkward. He would almost as soon have thought of first addressing a royal personage, as the usually haughty man before him.

‘I have to thank you,’ continued Mr. Stavers, at length, ‘I have to thank you, Mr. Grey, for a very important service which you have rendered me; a service prompted by thoughtful kindness, and executed with equal discretion and firmness.’

Taken by surprise, having imagined that the private conference had been desired for some purely business purpose, Godfrey answered but the truth, when he said, ‘Indeed, Sir, I do not know to what you are alluding.’

‘Is it possible you can have forgotten — is it possible you can doubt my obligation to you?’ asked Mr. Stavers, in reply; yet without waiting to be answered, he continued, ‘My housekeeper has told me how you acted last week, on — on the occasion of — of my bereavement; how you prevented the wounds of my broken heart from being further probed and lacerated by public gossip and idle chatter. And, Sir, I wish you to know how much I thank you.’ As he finished speaking, the proud man leaned his head upon his

hand, so that his face was in a great measure hidden. And Godfrey answered in a choking voice —

‘It was only natural to do as I did: I felt so certain what your feelings must be.’

‘Yours was an active sympathy, Mr. Grey, and —’

At that moment there was a tap at the door, and mastering all appearance of emotion in a moment, Mr. Stavers said, ‘Come in,’ quite in a calm tone of voice.

‘If you please, Sir,’ said one of the clerks, just stepping within the room and holding the door in his hand, ‘if you please, Sir, there is some one from Messrs. B——’s with a private note to you, and a request that he may see you *immediately*,’ and the speaker laid great stress on the last word.

‘Tell him to walk in,’ replied Mr. Stavers, and while the clerk bowed himself out, the great man added, ‘We are interrupted, Mr. Grey, but I shall see you again,’ holding out his hand as he spoke.

I have said before that Mr. Stavers never ‘shook hands,’ but this was the first time that Godfrey Grey had touched his fingers, through all the long years of their daily intercourse. Tender-hearted, and sympathetic as a woman, not to mention the chord in his own life which was touched, poor Godfrey was quite overcome. A mist floated between his eyes and the broad ledger to which he returned, confusing black ink and red, and confounding the columns of debtor and creditor. Many manœuvres were necessary to avoid meeting the glances of his companions, and a great effort was made to speak, when needful, with composure. Moreover, he had no appetite for the frugal dinner, consisting of cold meat and bread, which, ac-

according to the practice of the last twelvemonth, he had brought daily in his pocket. For many years previously he had either returned home to dine with his sister, or regaled himself at a chop-house.

The clocks from the neighboring churches had chimed the hours, two — three — four — half-past five had struck, and this was Godfrey's time for leaving. Some of the juniors stayed a little later, as well as one old man, who had been even longer in the house than Godfrey, and the drudge of two generations. It never entered into the mind of any of them that Mr. Stavers might still be in his room, the door of which was a few inches ajar; so methodical were his habits, and so invariably did he leave the counting-house between four and five o'clock, usually making his exit through a private side-door. They had not reckoned on one simple truth, that home was home to him no longer, and that he gladly lingered anywhere, far from its precincts.

'The old Governor seems cut up about his daughter,' said one of the party, as soon as Godfrey was out of hearing, throwing down his pen, and placing himself with his back to the fire, keeping off the warmth from every one else, in a manner which is thoroughly vulgar, because thoroughly selfish, — but it must be added also, thoroughly English. The speaker was quite an illustrious instance of the commonplace — indifferent to sentiment, or inclined to ridicule it, because he had little or no feeling himself. 'Yet, what does it signify,' he continued, 'the old fellow has got money enough for two.'

'I think Grey seems as much cut up as the poor

Governor; indeed, he has not been himself the whole week,' said another clerk, who was married, and a father, and who was a man of a very different stamp from the first speaker.

'And no wonder,' sighed the old clerk, the 'drudge' already alluded to.

'No wonder! why not?' exclaimed two or three at once.

'I could tell why, if I pleased.'

'Then do please,' said the speaker who had first mentioned Godfrey. 'He is not married, — he never had a daughter run away from him, had he?'

'I might answer no, and yes, to that question. He never was married, and never had a daughter; but he and his poor blind sister adopted a little orphan girl, and brought her up with more love than sometimes parents show. Bless you, I remember her well enough, years ago. I used often to spend an evening with Grey, and many's the time I have seen little Mary sitting on his knee, with her arms round his neck, her rosy cheek pressed tight against his pale one, and her bright golden curls waving over his shoulders. She used to call him uncle, but he was no relation, I know.'

'Who was she?' asked one of the listeners.

'I forget the name, she was never called anything but Mary. But I've a suspicion,' continued the old man, perceiving that his reminiscences seemed interesting, and proud of having a story to tell: 'I've more than a suspicion, from many a hint his sister dropped, that she was the daughter of Grey's first love, who married another, and died a beggar.'

'Grey in love! well, that is more than I can imagine,' said the youth at the fire, pulling up his collar, and passing his fingers through his long hair.

'And why not?' returned the old man. 'I can tell you, thirty years ago, he was a better-looking fellow than any of you here, and a good soul always. Think how he put up with the fretful ways of his poor sister, who was always fretting and fuming because she could not do what she had done, and what had worn away her eye-sight. I know how he deprived himself of enjoyments to give her luxuries, and how they both lived only to bring up that child; and then to consider the return she made them, the little minx! I never think of her without feeling that I should like to box her ears.'

'Why, what did she do?' drawled out the chief enjoyer of the fire.

'Do! Why, eloped with a mere boy, not able to keep her. Grey tells me there's no harm about the lad, if he could only get good and regular employment; but they are miserably poor, and there's a young child there too, another Mary; and I know, what he does not tell me, that he half supports them all, and pinches himself in all manner of ways to do so. And now, I suppose, you can understand how it is that Grey has felt so much for the 'Governor,' as you call him — though such slang was not used in my younger days.'

CHAPTER IV.

It was the following morning, but just at the same hour, and addressing the same person, and using the same words, Mr. Stavers again said, 'Tell Mr. Grey that I wish to see him.'

And Godfrey, obedient to the summons, and seated in the same chair, and awaiting the termination of just such a pause as that which preceded their brief discourse the day before, felt for a moment as if the twenty-four hours which had intervened were nought. Yet very seldom does a single day work such a change of thought and feeling as that which had taken place in the heart of Mr. Stavers.

'We were interrupted yesterday,' he said, breaking the silence, 'and I do not regret that it was so, for a circumstance, which I need not relate, has shown me, if indeed I required such a proof, how sincerely I have your sympathy. I cannot tell how it is, but so it is, and I am not ashamed to own that the fault must be mine, that we have hitherto been too little known to each other; in short, Mr. Grey, I have not sufficiently appreciated your worth.'

Alas, for poor human nature! our powers of appreciation are wonderfully quickened by personal liking, and personal liking is marvellously engendered by similarity of suffering! After all, does not the difference between a great mind and a little one consist in the large experience and extended sympathy of the one, and the narrow views and little feeling of the other? At present Mr. Stavers did not know how much wiser

and better his recent sorrow and its consequences were making him. To his unexpected harangue Godfrey only answered confusedly —

‘ Sir — indeed — you are very good ’ ——

‘ How many years have you been in our employ ? ’ interrupted Mr. Stavers.

‘ Since I was a boy, Sir, and I am now fifty-five.’

‘ Good heavens ! All your life — through your few joys and your many sorrows, still our faithful, active servant ! How little have I thought of many things which should have had my attention ! But I will make amends for the past, Mr. Grey,’ continued Mr. Stavers, extending his hand, and really shaking hands with his clerk ; ‘ meanwhile, having only heard the outlines of your domestic history, I ask you as a personal favor to communicate to me as much more of it as you can do agreeably to yourself.’

Startled as he was by so strange a request, Godfrey had no inclination to refuse it, and in his own simple words he related the incidents, which it would be a twice-told tale again to describe. He touched but lightly on the disappointment of his youth ; yet how much was betrayed in the few words, ‘ After that time I never thought of marrying ! ’ But when he came to speak of his blind sister and of the orphan girl they both loved so well, his feelings warmed ; and when he dwelt on the bitter sorrow her elopement had occasioned, and how sad was the thought, that with all their love she did not trust it, did not seek their counsel, or shrink from deceiving them, Mr. Stavers was visibly affected. He rose from his chair, and paced the room in agitation, exclaiming at last —

‘And yet, Mr. Grey, you have forgiven them — you see them — you help them, out of your little — out of the poverty which in your old age you were willing to encounter, that you might rear that ungrateful, heartless girl!’

‘Dear Sir,’ interrupted Godfrey, with emotion, ‘don’t speak hardly of her; if I think harsh things of her sometimes, I cannot bear that others should say them. I would rather hear excuses made for her. Poor child! she had no mother; my afflicted sister was but little companion for her sprightly youth; and as for me, all day, every day in business, I could only love her, with small opportunity of showing her the depth of my affection. My poor Mary!’

The name — the same name — how it struck upon the ear of the proud father! how the words of the poor clerk struck upon his soul! and what a war of feelings, wishes, fears, intentions, was there at that moment in his heart!

‘You, who have ready excuses for your Mary,’ exclaimed Mr. Stavers, ‘what apologies have you to offer for mine?’

‘The same,’ murmured Godfrey, ‘the same, or very similar. Oh! let us not be hard upon the young; let us not demand the sacrifice of a whole life as the penalty for one youthful error. Which of us can look back on his own youth, and not feel what a dangerous season it was — not acknowledge its strong impulses and shallow reasoning? if we escaped its rocks and quicksands, should we not be thankful rather than vain-glorious?’

There was another pause. ‘Mr. Grey,’ said Mr.

Stavers at last, 'you have once voluntarily rendered me a service, will you do me another at my bidding? I reached Scotland too late to prevent my child's marriage, and I have since refused to see her — refused even to open her letters. Will you see her — you — my sympathizing, confidential friend? Make no promises, but I charge you with no threats. See *him*, tell me what he says, what he does, what he looks, and then advise me.'

Is there need to tell with what tearful joy the poor clerk undertook this glad commission? Surely not; but this we may say, that his honest, faithful nature, and his warm and sympathizing heart rendered him the fittest peace-maker that could have been chosen. As had been said of the humbler Mary's husband, the young lieutenant 'had no great harm in him,' except his poverty; and except the dark fault in which both shared, that of tempting a young and loving girl to take an unwomanly step, and wound the heart to which she owed the deepest gratitude. But excellent Godfrey Grey found more apologies for the young people than in their humiliation they knew how to find for themselves. After many interviews with them, he at last was the bearer of forgiveness, and at last brought the father and daughter together. It was the happiest day of Godfrey's life hitherto, yet a few perhaps, still happier are in store for him! For a large increase of salary for himself, and the patronage of Mr. Stavers for the humbler Mary's young husband, have smoothed down difficulties and removed disagreeables in a remarkable manner.

My memoir of the Merchant and his Clerk is draw-

ing to a close; but it has failed in its object if it has not shown that people may be in daily personal contact, and yet unknown to each other — separated as if by a wall of adamant — by pride, coldness, and wrong impressions. It is sad to think how often hearts which have at least each one pulse that thrills in unison with the other, and probably many more chords of sympathy, live on in ignorance of the life-sweets they are losing — live on, often and often all through long lives, because they do not make opportunities for knowing each other better, instead of waiting for the rare occasions which sometimes establish sympathy — a sympathy all the more precious and soul-enlarging, if it exist between human beings widely separated by fortune and station.

OUR NEW SHOPS.

It is not worth while to point out a precise locality for the story I have to tell. Every one knows how new neighborhoods arise on the outskirts of old ones, springing up by the builder's art with almost the rapidity of enchantment; altering the map of the district completely, and puzzling the 'oldest inhabitant' to find his way about, should business or pleasure have driven him from home for even a few weeks, or illness have kept him within the house. I always feel an interest in the first occupants of pretty new houses. Whether they are a young couple just arrived from the bridal tour, in the busy delight of arranging their dwelling, and preparing for the half dreaded reception days; or a staid elderly pair retiring from business, and looking forward to a serene old age, earned and deserved by the untiring industry of youth and middle life, there always seems to be a fresh start in existence associated with a new house, and a halo of hope shed about it, which seldom belong to the adoption of a long used, if not time-honored residence. And if such feelings are associated with the 'Terraces,' and the 'Crescents,' and the pretty cottages, called Gothic,

perhaps, but belong to no order of architecture under the sun, they certainly exist in a tenfold degree in reference to the rows of new *shops*, which pertain to a new neighborhood, in an indispensable manner. True, at the first glance the subject may seem less picturesque, but the interest arising from it is far more intense : just as to my mind the thronging associations of London itself are more full of heart-stirring poetry, than the loveliest scenes over which a painter ever revelled.

The bold adventurers — the first occupants of the new shops ! The broad outlines of their histories are often very similar. Too poor to buy an established business, they seek a new neighborhood with the hope of making one ; and raise the money necessary for even this purpose, by stratagems and self-denial, and the sacrifice of independence, and too often a sufferance of painful obligation, of which the affluent and well to do can form but a faint idea. There is no doubt that a new shop — just as youth can dispense with many of the adventitious ornaments of dress — may make a respectable appearance with fewer equipments than are necessary to the old dusty, rusty looking shelves and counter. Besides, for a considerable time, it looks as if it were still undergoing the process of furnishing, and a visitor is inclined to judge favorably of the future from the promises of the present. If the first occupant can struggle through a twelvemonth, he has a fair chance of success, but how often do we find, at the end of less than half that time, the shutters closed, and a board affixed indicating that the house is again to let : or perhaps the announce-

ment—‘This shop will be opened next week as a butcher’s;’ or the linen-draper’s converted into a cheesemonger’s with almost the dexterity which follows the touch of a harlequin’s wand. And then comes a new question—an enigma for time to solve—will the second comer be more fortunate than his predecessor, or he too be a Curtius in the gulf? As genius that ‘is before its time’ fails to be appreciated, and finds no portion of the earth’s inheritance parcelled out for its mundane uses; so the shopkeeper who comes before he is wanted, meets a bitter lot, and barrenness in return for all his industry!

Our New Shops stand in the high road; where it seems but the other day was all open ground, with a ditch running between it and the path: were the day ever so calm, there was always a breeze in passing along, and in boisterous weather one found oneself between the Scylla and Charybdis of the ditch and the road, whither weak-limbed pedestrians were often drifted at the will of the winds. But the land was drained; the ditch dried up; foundations sunk; and houses built before half the neighbors knew what was going to happen; and wonderment as to what shops they would be had not half exhausted itself, when their physiognomy was openly revealed, and cards and notes sent round to every house, soliciting patronage, and promising, of course, ‘dispatch and punctuality,’ the ‘best’ goods at the ‘lowest’ prices, ‘indefatigable attention,’ and the ‘newest improvements.’

The houses were finished, and the first occupants entered within a very few weeks of each other; and great was the sensation created thereby. Everybody

was inclined to 'try' something from the new shops, and from the proverbial excellence of samples most people were satisfied with the results. Nevertheless, by that principle of conservatism which is part of the national character, the greater number of temporary customers went back to their old tradespeople, putting up with the inconvenience of the distance so often complained of in the 'olden time.' To the thoughtful observer, it was pretty evident the new shops would have a hard struggle, ere they could be expected to prosper. Now as necessities are sought before luxuries, it may be taken as a pretty general rule, that the dealers in food settling in a new neighborhood have a better chance of success than they who open emporiums of more superfluous articles. People have daily need of bread, and meat, and tea, and butter, and commonly procure them at the nearest depôt, whereas they can bide their time about the purchase of a new coat or dress, and commonly take the recommendation of a friend in selecting a silversmith or upholsterer. Consequently, the butcher, the baker, and the general dealer, were among the new comers those who flourished the most speedily and decidedly; and it is to the last mentioned I would more particularly refer.

George West was a young man of five or six and twenty. He had started in business with the advantage of being unincumbered by debt, having recently inherited a legacy of a few hundred pounds from a relative, which money had stocked his shop and furnished his house, and left him still somewhat before the world. *He* could afford to wait a little while till business gathered round him; and gather it did, for in

the first place such a shop as his was greatly wanted in the district, and secondly he had good articles, which joined to strict integrity and attention on his part soon won him patrons and friends. Occupied with his business and intent upon it, he had small time for either listening to, or repeating gossip, and perhaps knew less of the affairs of his neighbors than any one in the 'row.' Pretty near all he did glean was from his woman-servant, a middle-aged body who had been in the service of his deceased uncle many years, and who now thought herself entitled to advise her youthful employer in all matters in which it appeared to her that experience should give her authority. Truth to tell, Patty was not always a good angel at her master's elbow. The same advice which is very valuable to the open-handed or the spendthrift, may be something more than unnecessary to one whose example has been parsimony, and whose habits are frugal. George West was not by nature either mean or selfish, but at this time he was very much the creature of early habits and example, and he certainly loved money without very clearly defining if it were for itself or its noble uses.

It was commonly while laying the cloth for her master's bread and cheese supper, after the shop was closed, that Patty opened her budget. By the way, Patty belonged to the old school, and was quite opposed to the early closing movement: she thought shopkeepers should take money as long as it was offered them, and was far too obtuse to understand that if people could not purchase what they wanted after six o'clock, they would contrive to do so before. She

thought reading and improving the mind all 'rubbish,' or, at best, only 'fit for gentlefolks.' And yet Patty was not hard-hearted, she was only ignorant and prejudiced. *Only!* Alas, what an admission—for ignorance and prejudice are more fruitful causes of suffering than hard-heartedness itself!

'Have the Smiths paid that bill?' asked Patty, as she placed the loaf upon the table.

'No,' replied West, 'I think I will send in for it to-morrow.'

'You'll not get it for once sending, I can tell you,' continued Martha; 'they are all going to the mischief, it is pretty plain. Hardly a bit of business doing—go in when you will—though that stuck-up son makes himself mighty busy, rolling and unrolling the silks and the ribbons, to hide that he has nothing better to do.'

'I am very sorry,' said West, 'for really they seem a respectable and industrious family.'

'Respectable, indeed! respectable people pay their bills every week.'

'Well, I'll send in to-morrow; I should not like to lose my money.'

'I should think not, indeed! Then there's the Burtons next door—pray do you ever expect to see their two pound fifteen and sixpence?'

'Perhaps not,' said the young tradesman with a sigh, 'but the loss will not ruin me, and I cannot find in my heart to be hard upon a lone widow woman.'

'Mr. George!' exclaimed Patty, dropping a knife, and very nearly damaging the crockery, in her aston-

ishment and indignation, 'that's not the way to do business. I'm sure it's enough to bring your dear dead uncle out of his grave, to hear you talk so. Lone widow, indeed! Lone widows should not run into debt, and then they would keep out of trouble. But I spoke my mind this morning, I can tell you.'

'You did! And whom to?' replied West, starting in his chair.

'Why to that minx of a daughter. Just to look at her little white hands when she ties up a parcel, or lifts down a book, might convince any one they had never done a day's work in her life: and pride and poverty is what I can't abide.'

'I never saw any pride,' said George West, gravely, 'and I am very sorry, very angry, Martha, if you have been rude about the bill. Even if they are proud, you ought to make some allowance, for Miss Burton has been genteelly brought up; her father was a gentleman, they say, and it's a great fall in the world to come down to keeping a little stationer's shop and circulating library.'

'A pretty gentleman, indeed! That didn't leave enough to bury him. I tell you what, Mr. George, gentility is just worth what grist it will bring to the mill, and I don't understand what it has to do with your two pound fifteen and sixpence,' and the elderly spinster bounced out of the room in anything but a gentle mood.

George West felt more annoyed than he had done for a long time. He did not relish his frugal supper so much as usual; and his uncomfortable feelings even disturbed his rest. The way to confer a kindness

delicately seldom occurs very readily to people unaccustomed to such an exercise ; and it must be owned the nobler qualities of his heart were at present, for want of exercise, but partially developed. And yet a sort of instinct prompted him to do something to remove the unpleasant impression he felt sure his officious servant had created. Certainly, Patty had anything but a blessing from her young master that night ; but finally, he resolved that he would go into the stationer's shop the next day, make some purchase, and see what turn events might take. And this resolution arrived at, he fell asleep, and dreamed—of the price of sugars, and a shameful imposition of sloe-leaves for tea !

Alas ! for poor Mrs. Burton's speculation ! She was 'before her time : ' a fancy stationer's or circulating library was not yet wanted in the new neighborhood ; and the absence of occupation for herself and daughter in the business of the shop, gave ample leisure for thought—sad recollections of the past and gloomy forebodings for the future. Alice was indefatigable in her exertions. The most tasteful articles which ornamented the shop window, and attracted the passers by, were made by her ; and the Berlin wool-work which had lately been added to their stock were all improvements upon the formal patterns. It was about seven o'clock on a summer evening, and she was seated in the little back parlor, busily employed on a large piece of canvass, when George West paid his intended visit. Not a step had crossed the threshold for the last hour ; and the widow moved quickly forward to ask the stranger's wishes—for she did not at the moment re-

cognise her 'creditor.' Attired in his holiday suit, and with scrupulous neatness, the young tradesman looked a different personage from the eager man of business behind his counter. Alice had involuntarily looked up and acknowledged *her* recognition of their neighbor by a slight bow, but had bent again immediately over her work.

Perhaps had Alice Burton sat for her picture, she would not have appeared to more advantage than she did on this chance occasion. Her well-fitting mourning dress set off her slight but symmetrical figure to advantage, and contrasted favorably with a complexion that was pale without being sickly. The slanting rays of the western sun threw her person into shadow, concealing the shabbiness of her attire, but glancing on the plaited masses of her rich brown hair, and drawing out that golden light which only sunshine can. While the bright tints of scarlet, and purple, and green, and amber wools growing into meaning beneath her fingers were not without their effect.

The widow's cheek flushed from many painful emotions, as she recognised young West; for she had little doubt he came to require the payment of a bill she had not the money to discharge. How was she surprised when, instead of alluding to it, he made friendly inquiries about the health of herself and Miss Burton — offered some commonplace remarks on the weather, and then inquired the price of a pair of screens which were exhibited for sale in the window.

'Alice, my love,' said Mrs. Burton, appealing to her daughter, 'I do not understand this mark, will you tell me what these are prized at?'

And Alice came forward to give the desired information, in the doing which it was elicited that the screens were painted by her. Had the sum been five times that named, George West would now have made the purchase ; as it was, without demur he took the money from his pocket, watching the while every movement of the white hands which Patty had remarked as they folded the screens in paper. Again the color mounted to Mrs. Burton's cheek as she gently pushed back the sovereign he had laid down for change, saying — ‘ No, Sir, we are in your debt much more than this — pray let your purchase be placed to that account.’

It was George West's turn now to look confused. The proposition was so reasonable and natural a one, that he had nothing to say against it, and yet the idea of *her* painting being bartered for such commodities as sugar and cheese, and soap and candles, had something in it against which his feelings revolted. There seemed to be no other plan of soothing them than to make his purchases far outweigh the amount of the widow's debt. He looked round — there was nothing else of Alice's work which it would not have seemed absurd for him to appropriate ; and meanwhile he had fallen into conversation with her, during which allusion was made to the cheap literature of the day, the most choice of which lay in profusion on the counter. Alice possessed that fine taste which in all things instinctively selects the good and leaves the indifferent as refuse ; and though really but little indebted to teachers for instruction, she was for her station in life well informed. The young tradesman felt her superiority, but without

any painful humiliation to himself. It only made his reverence and admiration the deeper; and at the recommendation of Alice he expended several pounds in books, and in purchasing sets and back numbers of established publications.

But George West could not stand all the evening talking across the counter; and from a mingled feeling of pride, and sense of obligation, and many emotions she would have been at a loss to analyze, Mrs. Burton did not invite him into the parlor. As for Patty's indignation on discovering her master's 'extravagance,' anything short of her own vocabulary would be insufficient to describe it. A vivid imagination may picture the scene which followed—a scene that would have been entirely ludicrous, had there not been something really piteous in the old woman's evident anguish. The screens—not suspecting they were Alice's own production—she might have tolerated. 'Yes, they were pretty, and would look well on the up-stairs chimney-piece—not that he wanted such things at all: but as for books—what good could they do him?—what use were they, except to come into the shop as waste-paper?' Poor Martha!—for one must pity a deposed tyrant—and not suspecting that a new dynasty was established, she believed that chaos was come again in the wreck and revolution she witnessed. The tears rolled down her withered cheeks as she left her master after supper, with a fresh candle just set up, and the pile of his new purchases by his side. Her prophetic fears told her that he would read till midnight, and she turned away with gesture and expression

something like those of Hogarth's steward in the *Marriage à-la-Mode*!

And night after night was Martha doomed to witness a similar arrangement. At first, George West devoted the end of his toiling day to reading, because the books and journals he had purchased were those Alice Burton had recommended; but as weeks and months passed on, and these were exhausted and fresh ones procured, he read because the enlargement and cultivation of his mind had grown to be a moral want of his nature. What a debt of obligation he owed to the gentle girl who had thus led him to a new and brighter world than that he had dwelt in before! A debt which from the depths of his heart he understood and acknowledged. Yet, as day by day he became really more worthy of the love to which he had aspired, his own diffidence increased — till he shuddered to remember how, in the early days of their acquaintance, he had dared almost to avow his admiration, and had met with a silent yet chilling rebuke, which he now felt was less severe than his presumption merited.

And who was Alice Burton, who had worked such a spell on the heart of the thrifty thriving tradesman? Only a very woman such as — thank God! — the world abounds with. It was true her father had been 'a gentleman,' an officer whom adverse fortune had compelled to sell his commission; but through such straits of poverty and sore distress had Alice been reared, that her advantages of education had really been infinitely inferior to those of George West. It was the instinct of her sex and her nature which had taught her, apparently from such sterile opportunities, taste,

refinement, and that peculiar understanding of the fitness of all things, which is a gift to the soul only second to genius itself. Who can fathom the mysterious laws by which the odorous garden-flower develops its beautiful being from the same soil and atmosphere that feed a thousand noxious weeds ?

Oh, Love — Love ! That tale as old as Eve in Paradise, and yet for ever new ; that Power which has swayed the hearts of the world's rulers, and yet given strength to the weakest, and taken refuge in the breast of the hind. Love, the sustainer — ennobler — and purifier ; for no one ever really loved without becoming — however good and great before — a better and nobler being. Thousands pass off the stage of life — aye, spouses and parents too — in utter ignorance of that Divine Mystery, or mistaking for that which is the most generous emotion of the soul, a degrading and selfish passion. Let us hope all things from the nature that is capable of loving ; and let us cease to rail at a world which Love illumines, even though its light shines fitfully and feebly, obscured by the mists of narrow teaching, and its tongue is constrained to silence by senseless deafening raillery. Let the Poets plead : they are the only Truth Tellers !

The true Lover is no selfish idle dreamer ; be his station what it may, he must act the poetry his heart conceives : and George West was no exception to the rule. During the very time that his evenings were devoted to the cultivation of his mind, and every hope of his heart was centred in the thought of growing more worthy of Alice Burton, his business increased beyond his warmest expectations. Nor was this sur-

prising. No time-exhausting, or expensive, or thought-distracting pleasures, had taken him from the duties of his station ; and in a few months he was the most prosperous tradesman in the ' row.' Already had he saved sufficient money to carry out what had once been a most dear object—the purchase of the house he occupied. But now it must be differently bestowed ; he became the owner of the ' next door,' taking upon himself the arrears of rent due from Mrs. Burton, and becoming, be sure, a lenient landlord.

Not yet had a word of love been spoken, though both remembered the occasion which George thought of with so much regret. On the part of Alice, too, there was some remorse : now she felt that she had been unnecessarily cold and harsh. How strange the change his silent, respectful homage had effected, aye, and the change which had taken place in his whole bearing and character since Love's holy influence had sway. Alice wondered if he really were altered, or if it had been some strange fancy which had painted him on their first acquaintance as commonplace and uninteresting.

Again Alice sat in the little parlor, with the bright-hued threads growing into forms of beauty beneath her fingers. But now the season was towards the close of a long and dreary winter ; and instead of western sunlight, the flickering fire and the beams of a shaded lamp lit up the room. Mrs. Burton was engaged in attending to the wants of two or three ladies in the shop, and agitated and excited by some information she had just received, was anything but expeditious in supplying them. She had learned within that hour that

their young neighbor was now their landlord ; and on this fact, relying, as she did, on his forbearance with regard to the arrears of rent, she built anew bright hopes of ultimate success, and of, at last, a thriving business. Like the over-sanguine in general, she believed that time was all she needed.

It was at this moment George West entered, and nodding good-humoredly to Mrs. Burton, passed on, with the familiarity of an intimate acquaintance, to the little parlor. Alice had thought he would come in that evening, and yet his step made her heart beat more quickly — that heart which was so full of strange contending feelings, and in which gratitude was to her own consciousness the most apparent. Her embarrassment was evident ; yet it did not pain George West : on the contrary he saw in it something of encouragement, and he grew emboldened enough to hold her hand for a moment longer than ordinary greeting demanded. Alice blushed, and the tears started — nay, rolled down her cheeks, as she felt constrained to utter some expressions of gratitude ; for the widow and her daughter had already received many kindnesses at his hands, and it would have been affectation to have seemed ignorant of the generous purpose which had actuated his purchase of the house. George West stammered forth some commonplace rejoinder ; but that moment of confusion broke away a barrier of reserve ; for the first time a wild hope darted through his frame, that Alice deigned to regard him a thought more warmly than as a kind friend ; while on her part she could no longer doubt that she was the object of a deep attach-

ment. With this knowledge came a thorough appreciation of his generous forbearance.

Time had been when Alice Burton, despite her own fallen fortunes, had been strongly imbued with the foolishness of all foolish false pride ; that which attaches nominal rank to nominal station. But though yet little more than twenty years old, the sorrows and struggles of life, and contact with its realities, had taught her a nobler lesson. In the days when even sumptuary laws prevailed, things were very different. But now, with a wiser generation, class distinctions have really little or no weight. True, we still decline associating intimately with the masses greatly below us in station ; but only *because*, for the most part, they are deficient in the cultivation of mind which would render them companions ; in the tone of feeling congenial to our own ; and in those manners and habits which are the atmosphere of our social existence. The ignorant and vulgar are too apt to slight the last attributes as frivolous and unmeaning attainments ; but a wider grasp of thought will teach them that a wholesome refinement of manner is but the outward sign of an indescribable but all-prevading essence most essential to real Progress. Let the individual, though still remaining of his class, yet raise himself by his mental and moral qualities above its standard, and he will find the ready hand held out — no shrinking on the part of his so-called superiors from equalizing association.

Alice Burton had grown to think George West as complete a 'gentleman' as she had ever known — But why go on ? The reader has already arrived at

the sequel, and intermediate details are becoming tedious. But it was not *that* night he dared to breathe his tale,—no, nor for many subsequent evenings, when he sat watching her nimble fingers, and really saying very little, considering how much there was he longed to tell! At last—it was some weeks afterwards, and Mrs. Burton had been more than commonly engaged in the shop—some word was dropped—they hardly know themselves how it came about—in short, it was the old yet ever new scene, which everybody can either remember or imagine. Tears—confessions—endearing words—not vows—there was no occasion for *them*, being but too often the spurious coinage of insincerity.

All this happened three years since! There was a wedding long ago. Mrs. West is very seldom seen in her husband's business; but she is an excellent wife, nevertheless, and manages his household and keeps his accounts admirably. Nor are these any trifling tasks, I assure you; for he has been obliged to purchase the *other* 'next door,' and throw it into his own shop, and has full employment for several busy assistants. Mrs. Burton has also by this time an excellent business, and, to tell a family secret, is to pay rent for her house, some day or another.

I had nearly forgotten to chronicle Patty's destiny. She could not live under the new system of things—the attempt would have broken her heart. And so she has gone to reside with her friends in the country, on the savings of her long and penurious life. Be sure her nephews and nieces have due reverence for her

opinions, and avoid offering her any temptations to extravagance. They believe, above all things, in mattresses stuffed with bank notes, and old stockings full of gold !

A STORY OF WAYS AND MEANS.

CHAPTER I.

IN their dull, dim parlor, Mrs. Hargrave and her daughter were seated; Caroline on a footstool by her mother's side. The house was in one of those grey-looking streets which abound in London, though many a denizen of the metropolis little heeds their existence. Branching indirectly from, and therefore generally parallel with, some great thoroughfare, they are thoroughfares themselves, but threaded so little as such, that the fact is almost forgotten, till the necessary (or unnecessary) nuisance of a paving perplexity breaks up the high road, dams up the stream of traffic, and sends its rushing tide of vehicles for days or weeks together down the 'quiet street,' waking its slumbering echoes with a ceaseless roar, breaking the nightly repose of its inhabitants, and working a revolution in its local customs. But the street I mean was distinguished by a further peculiarity from the general class to which it belonged. It was an artist-street, the sign thereof being that here and there a window, as if regardless of the symmetry of outward appearance, soared upwards, apparently ambitious of communicating with its neighbor overhead.

And Mr. Hargrave was a painter; one of a band so numerous, that no one can fancy, in the description of him, that an individual is sketched. A man of talent, not genius; with more aspiration than power; and imbued with that selfish, self-willed egotism which, though it may sometimes overshadow a great mind, much oftener dwarfs to still narrower dimensions, and shrivels up a little one.

I have said it was a dull, dim parlor, but not a dirty or dingy one; for neatness and cleanliness were as apparent as the shabbiness of the furniture. If curtains and chair covers were faded, it was from washing as well as from wear. Poverty reigned there with his iron sceptre, and his heel on all the flowers of life, but he wore a mask, half pride, half resignation, and his aspect was less repellant than it often is, when his rule is far less cruel and despotic. The first floor of the house was occupied by the artist as a studio. There pictures were painted which did, or did not, bring golden returns; there patrons — the few he had — were received; and there he indulged his dreams of future fame and appreciation, railing at the dullness of the multitude, because it failed to call him great, and — in one sense happily for himself — wrapping himself in his self-consciousness as in a protecting garment of egotism, which shut out all the vulgar cares of life. He little thought — and he could not have been made to comprehend — that his very selfishness was the barrier to true greatness. Intellect, knowledge, learning, a life-long practice in the mechanism of his Art — all these he had, but he wanted the generous pulse of feeling which would have added a soul to the

evidences of mind, and warmed with the heart-fire of Genius his clever cold creations !

He did not know — and he could not have been taught to comprehend — that the calm, patient, care-worn wife, deputed to the ignoble tasks of domestic drudgery ; to the ingenious stratagems by which she strove to make one sovereign fulfil the legitimate services of two ; and to the painful interviews when pressing tradesmen begged the settlement of long standing accounts ; had *acted* a finer poem in her forty years of life, than his brain had ever imagined, or his pencil executed. I have said that she and her daughter were seated in that dark parlor, but few would have guessed how occupied. The employment will appear little profitable, nay, perhaps on the contrary, it may seem to belong to the pomps and vanities of life. Briefly, then, by the mingled lights of winter twilight and a bright, if not large fire, she was plaiting and braiding her daughter's rich dark hair. From Caroline's early childhood it had been the doting mother's pride ; no other hand had ever tended it, from the days of the golden curls, through all their deepening shades, till now, in its rich profusion, her hair was of that dark hue which looks black until sun-light or fire-light brings out its greater brilliance. Helpful in most things beyond the average of her age and condition, in one respect Caroline Hargrave was helpless to the last degree. Beyond gathering up her long hair with a comb, or parting it in thick locks, when damp from its frequent bath, the maiden of sixteen had not a notion of arranging her greatest adornment. Deep and beautiful as was the mutual attachment of the mother

and her only child, to my mind there was something touching in the phase of it I am describing. The symmetrical figure bursting into the perfection of its rounded beauty, was little likely to have gayer apparel than the home-made cotton gown; the little foot was commonly disguised in cheap and clumsy shoes; the small and well shaped hand had never known a Parisian glove; and her fair young face and violet blue eyes had never been 'set off' by the witchery of a 'darling' bonnet. The coarsest straw, or dowdy combinations of mysterious manufacture were the only head-gear she had ever possessed — but the beautiful hair! that at least the mother could control, and limb-wearied, or mind-wearied, early or late, some hour of the day she would surely find, in which, with practised hand and loving gesture to wreath its wavy masses, one day in one fashion, the next in some other, till one might have thought variety itself was exhausted.

'Mamma,' said Caroline, looking up with a smile, and an expression of countenance that seemed a laughing contradiction to her words, 'Mamma, do you know I am very vain of my hair!'

'Not vain, my love, I am sure,' said Mrs. Hargrave, shaping as she spoke, a massive plait like a coronet for the young head that leaned upon her knee. 'Not vain, I am sure, though of course you know it is beautiful.'

'Dear mamma! cannot you tell what I mean?' exclaimed Caroline, 'that I must have been deaf or blind last night, not to discover how beautifully you had dressed it. Really, I felt what lady Fitzroy said was quite true, that no lady's in the room looked so well as mine.'

And I thought how kind and how clever my dear mamma was, and how much I wished she had been there to hear her tasteful work admired.' And Caroline kissed the hand that was conveniently near her lips.

' Ah, I have been so busy all the morning, that you have not told me half the particulars of the ball yet — your first ball, too. Did you really enjoy it, my darling ? '

' Oh yes, — was it not kind of Miss Graham to invite me ? '

Now Miss Graham was what might be called a young old maid, rich and generous, good and clever, and handsome enough to make a very handsome portrait, for the which she had recently sat to Mr. Hargrave. The painter despised with most supreme contempt that branch of his art, by which alone a twenty pound note was likely to find its way into his house ; and had he suspected that his sitter really cared very little whether the portrait were a likeness or not, and merely thus employed him, as a delicate manner of benefitting his wife and daughter, it is probable contempt and indignation would have prevented him undertaking the commission. Yet such was the truth, and when to this trait of her character is added the fact that a week before the ball, she sent Caroline a quantity of India muslin, with the prettiest of notes, begging her acceptance of the same, saying, that she had received a present of several pieces from a cousin in the east, (so she had seven years ago,) and leaving her to suppose this was one of them, though really purchased that morning at Howell's — when this second

trait of character is perceived, and understood, the discriminating reader will be intimately acquainted with the shrewd, generous, rather eccentric, but very high-hearted Emily Graham.

‘Tell me,’ continued Mrs. Hargrave, recalling to her mind, as it were a picture, the figure of her young daughter as she had appeared the night before in her filmy, floating muslin robe, and her rich dark hair, without on either the addition or adornment of a gem or a flower, ‘tell me,’ she continued, ‘did you dance much, and who was it that found you partners?’

‘Miss Graham herself,’ said Caroline, ‘and not only did she introduce me to partners, but to several ladies who were there, calling me her “young friend;” was not this kind and considerate? And do you know, I liked better to talk to them than to the strange gentlemen? The latter asked me about operas, and theatres, and books I had never read, and I could only say, “I don’t know” to all that was said. And then I felt confused, and that made me seem sillier than ever.’

‘But the ladies,’ said Mrs. Hargrave, with a smile, ‘praised your hair, and so you felt at home in the discourse, — was that it, Caroline?’

‘Dear mamma, can you think me so foolish? The ladies talked to me about many things, and when I seemed ignorant, enlightened me. I did not feel confused at all with them, and I can hardly tell how it came about that Lady Fitzroy admired my hair, and called her daughter to observe its arrangement, recommending her to describe the style to her French maid Annette.’

‘Then I suppose we shall have the honor of establishing a fashion, my child.’

‘I do not think so,’ replied Caroline, ‘for the young lady shook her head, and said, ‘that if her maid could dress hair with half the simple grace that mine displayed, she might soon make a fortune at no other employment.’

Mrs. Hargrave was twining the last loose tress round her fingers while Caroline spoke, and the daughter did not remark that she paused a moment dropping her hands for that instant on the young girl’s shoulder. Then quickly completing her self-appointed task, the mother stooped to kiss the smooth fair brow before her, and dismissed her child with one of those fond words which are the sweetest music loving lips can utter, when, tuned by one heart’s key-note, they reach another no less warm.

CHAPTER II.

THE scene is again the parlor in the ‘quiet street;’ but three years have passed, and busy as old Time must have been about more important matters, he had condescended to leave there agreeable evidence of his passage. The room was no longer dim and dull; on the contrary, it wore a decided air of substantial comfort. Instead of worn and faded chintz, thick curtains of a plain but serviceable manufacture, kept out the wintry air: a warm carpet felt soft to the feet; an easy chair stretched out its inviting arms on one side

of the fire, whilst on the other a comfortable couch extended its length. Nor was the room without an ornament. Opposite to the chimney-glass, and reflected therein so that the picture seemed always present, was a beautiful portrait of Caroline Hargrave — in truth, one of her father's most successful productions. Representing her simply attired in white, it recalled precisely her appearance on the eventful night of her first ball; and at the moment of which we are speaking the original was not by, to invite comparisons.

Mrs. Hargrave was seated on the couch, and beside her was a gentleman, a young man of three or four and twenty, who though deeply interested in the conversation which was going on, and looking withal remarkably happy, yet raised his eyes every now and then either to the portrait or its reflection, as if it were the presiding deity of the place. Although three years had passed, so far from the lady looking older, the case was absolutely the reverse; a truth which was the more apparent from the circumstance of her being much better dressed than before, wearing on this occasion a quiet and matronly dress of dark satin. Her habitual expression now was one of repose and contentment, but at this moment it was lighted by a visible half-tearful gladness, and yet ruffled by some feeling that partook of anxiety.

‘Why will you,’ exclaimed Wilton Bromley, for we will take up their discourse at the minute when Asmodeus-like, we look in, ‘why will you, my dear lady, revert to what you are pleased to call the inequality of our station? I will admit it only to be inequality of fortune; and I am so eccentric as to think this an in-

equality which renders us peculiarly well suited to each other. Dearly as I love Caroline, were I penniless it would be a sorry subject to speak of our marriage — and were she rich, I should distrust the power of my moderate income — should feel there were something wrong in our relative positions — should despair of ever knowing the exquisite sensation, the thought, that even in the most worldly sense, and in reference to mere material comforts, her future lot promises to be brighter and easier than her past.'

Mrs. Hargrave pressed his hand, and said with emotion, 'You are all that is good and generous.'

'And what can be really a richer inheritance,' the young man continued, 'than health, talent and beauty? If an artist be fit companion for our nobles, surely his daughter may mate with a simple gentleman.'

'A really great artist!' murmured Mrs. Hargrave, as if half ashamed of the insinuation her words conveyed, and yet determined to speak the truth.

'I am no connoisseur,' said Wilton, 'nor is this the time to discuss Mr. Hargrave's talents. If,' he added with a smile, 'I do not always award him the pinnacle he assumes for himself, I cannot deny him very great talents; and even by the vulgar and often false measure of success he may be tried, since his Art has provided honorable and comfortable sustenance for his family, and has educated a daughter to be the paragon I think her.'

'Suppose he has not done this?' said Mrs. Hargrave, looking down and playing with the fringe of her apron.

'How!' returned Wilton, 'then he has a private

fortune, which for his sake, but for that alone, I rejoice to learn.'

'Not so. Is it possible Miss Graham has never hinted at a means of income not apparent to the world in general?'

'Now you mention it, she once hinted at some secret, calling it a gold mine, and speaking in as mysterious a manner as if she were setting me an enigma to guess. Having no talent for that sort of thing it passed from my mind, but now that you recall the circumstance, I do recollect that she clearly intimated that it was something which resounded to your honor, and that if when I discovered the fact I should not think so, I should deserve to lose Caroline, whom she would immediately endeavor to console, and provide with a worthier lover.'

'Noble-hearted woman!'

'Yes, noble-hearted, and right-minded is she,' returned Wilton Bromley; 'and of this I am sure, that whatever she approved must have been noble and right; wise too and prudent, it is very likely, in that lower sense of wisdom and prudence to which the greatest wisdom is not of necessity allied; for Miss Graham's enthusiasm is always joined to the practical genius of common sense. So, dear lady, either gratify the curiosity you have piqued, or leave the riddle still unsolved, if so it please you.'

'My heart allows me no choice; for a mean deception, carefully planned, seems to me but the ill-favored twin of a bold falsehood. Not that there is pain in telling *you* the truth; — the trial was to tell my husband.'

‘A mystery to him, too — wonder on wonder!’

‘For a time even to him; but listen, and I will sketch the history of my married life in a few sentences. I married early, with but a small fortune, besides the riches of hope and youth. We loved each other, at least my husband loved — still loves — me as well as a vain man and an egotist is capable of loving. But I saw not his faults then, and bitter — bitter indeed was the knowledge of them when it came. Taking his dreams of fame and fortune for solid expectations, I saw my little property consumed without much anxiety; nor did I know for long how much it was really diminished.

‘Suddenly the blow fell; three years after our marriage, and when Caroline was an infant in my arms, I learned that we were penniless. I do not believe it possible that they who have never known poverty can be made to understand what the Struggle of Life really is — forgive me if I say this even to you;’ and she pressed Wilton Bromley’s hand as she spoke, ‘if they could be taught this knowledge it would be, I think, the most beneficial revelation the human race could receive. The cares which depress till they degrade, the necessity of money-seeking, until the jaundiced eye sees even earth’s noblest things by its own false medium; the withering of the heart’s best qualities for want of the power of exercising them; the writhing under petty obligations, writhing because they are so gracelessly conferred nine times out of ten; the serfdom of the very soul whose thoughts even are not free.’

‘Believe me, I can realize all this,’ said Wilton, with much feeling.

‘You think you can, as a thousand other generous natures have said and thought: but I tell you there is a new sense comes to us with this sort of suffering, but a sense that vibrates only to its own agony. The rich may comprehend the condition of the helpless, abject poor, the utterly destitute, but of the yet deeper trials of the *struggling* they know but little more than can a blind man know of sight, even by the most vivid description, and with the strongest human sympathy.’

‘This life of suffering was mine,’ she continued, when tears had relieved the bitterness of her recollections, ‘for years, many years; mine, I say, rather than ours, for, wrapped in his own dreams, Mr. Hargrave scarcely shared them. But amid all I had one joy, my only child, my Caroline. — It was my aim to keep her heart uncorroded by worldly cares, and the bitterness of poverty; I did this, and in the very doing my own soul escaped at intervals from its corruption. In one respect my husband’s abstraction and isolation worked well. I took care that discourses about money, about poverty, should not meet her ear. Until the age of sixteen I educated her myself, for I was able, with the help of books, to do this; although when I attempted to make my poor acquirements serviceable as a daily teacher, I found younger and abler instructors very naturally preferred. Perhaps my mother’s love quickened my abilities; at all events thus it was. At sixteen Caroline went to her first ball — you remember the night?’

‘How well! Never has her image been entirely

driven from my heart from that hour ; though for a while absence and travel might have weakened the impression. It was long before I recognised the real nature of my feelings, but I now know that in that girlish grace — see, Mamma ! it is beaming down upon us now ’ — and he pointed to the picture — ‘ and almost childish simplicity, I met my destiny. What a beautiful portrait it is. Her father has caught just the expression she wore ; too innocent of evil to be frightened, too pure and graceful to be *gauche*, her natural timidity had a fascination about it beyond all words to describe. I remember comparing her to a white dove whose wings had strayed among the peacocks of an aviary ; and then her beautiful hair ! oh, I had no comparison for that.’

‘ You thought it beautifully dressed,’ said Mrs. Hargrave, with a tearful smile.

‘ I don’t know how it was dressed,’ said Wilton, adding with the most charming ignorance of the mysteries of the toilet, ‘ it did not seem arranged at all ; the beauty of it was, it looked so natural — as it always does ! ’

‘ You know I always dress Caroline’s hair ? ’

‘ Yes, I have heard her say so. What is to be done when I take her away ? I must absolutely apprentice a maid to you, to be instructed in the art.’

‘ I think you had better ; the idea, I assure you, is not in the least absurd. I would take her without a fee — that would be the only point not quite *en regle*.’

‘ Good Heavens ! what do you mean ? No, surely — a light is breaking on me ! ’

‘ I mean the admiration excited on the occasion you

mention first gave me the idea of turning my talent for hair-dressing to profitable account. A talent originating in a mother's love and pride—though perhaps assisted by opportunities and accidents likely enough to surround an artist's wife. The naturalness you observed seems to be the secret of my success, and the particular by which I am distinguished from the herd of *coiffeurs*. A day or two after Caroline's first ball, I called on Miss Graham, mentioned the idea which had flashed upon my mind, received her instant sympathy and approbation—and more than this, her introductions were the stepping-stones to my fortune.'

'Fortune!'

'Yes, fortune; at least, in comparison with our former poverty such it has been, to make twenty guineas a week in the London season, besides receiving fees from ladies' maids and others merely to be allowed to look on, while I operated. And out of the season, I am perpetually being sent for into the country, and well paid for my time and trouble. These are the "ways and means" which have paid my husband's debts; have surrounded us with every needful comfort; and have given Caroline for two years the benefit of the best masters in every branch of her education. Wilton Bromley will not despise his wife's mother, for having practised so very humble a branch of Art.'

'He will love and honor her the more,' said Wilton, pressing her in his arms, 'that is, if further love and reverence from him be possible. No wonder, with such a mother, Caroline is peerless. But say, what did you mean by its being "a trial, to tell your husband" this history, which to me seems beautiful?'

‘He has a different pride from yours.’

‘And now that the results are so fortunate and evident?’ asked Bromley.

‘The subject is never mentioned between us — he acts as if the thing were not. But let me ring now, and send for Caroline — she has longed for days past that I should tell you the Great Secret!’

OUR PHILOSOPHER'S DREAM.

RAIN — rain — rain ! North, south, east, west, not a rent in the cloudy curtain that shut out the sunshine ; not a strip of blue sky to let in even a ray of hope for a change. The third day, too, of this wet and chilly weather, and we, a party of Londoners, invited to enjoy the country ! By courtesy it was called summer, because the month was August ; but pleasanter, say I, is it to meet the clear bracing frost of January, and even its pelting snow, than your chilly summer's day, especially if there be a division in the household about the propriety of kindling a fire in the general sitting-room. Look, too, out of doors ; how the trees are shivering and dripping in their rich foliage beneath the melting sky ; how the flowers are bent down by the heavy rain, and the young buds, instead of opening in beauty and fragrance, trail, soiled and rotting, on the earth ! Whither have the birds fled so silently ? Not one is to be seen or heard. Flap, flap — that is the laburnum branch against the drawing-room window — for the wind is high, driving the rain as if in sheets of water. That heavy branch ought to have been cut or trained ; yet it made a pleasant shade in the sultry weather last week !

We were a party of nearly a dozen, and no doubt each person considered him or herself as a reasonably good-tempered and agreeable individual ; and certainly there could be no difference of opinion about the many admirable qualities, including agreeability and good temper, of our kind host and hostess, and yet the continued wet weather, to say the least of it, *tried* everybody. In the first place, the house was one taken by our host for a short period before commencing a tour, while repairs went on in his own commodious residence ; and surely 'a furnished house' is a generic term, expressive of great discomfort. No library was found among the furniture, or necessary articles provided ; not a book was there in the house, except a few stray volumes which had crept into the ladies' packages, or secreted themselves in the gentlemen's carpet-bags ; and these with the omnivorous appetite produced by the weather, were, I believe, mentally devoured before the end of the first pouring day. Not a musical instrument in the rooms, save a shrill five-octave piano, which, from its tottering legs to its partial speechlessness, betrayed all the infirmities of age ; an accordion, which somebody had brought, but nobody could play (otherwise than asthmatically) ; and a flute, on which a young gentleman *thought* he could discourse eloquent music, and with which he had provided himself, possibly with the hope of charming some of the neighboring dryads and naiads during a projected boating and picnic excursion. But as we had 'too much of water' around us, to admit of our floating gaily upon it, our flute-player was obliged to content himself with mere mortal listeners, for whose

solace he rung the changes on 'Isle of Beauty,' 'A Bumper of Burgundy,' and 'Rousseau's Dream,' kindly volunteering, in the desperation of our ennui, 'a few bars' from pieces which 'he could not perfectly recollect without the notes.' Honor be to his good-nature, if not to his flute-playing! — the first professor could only have done his best for our amusement.

In the desperation of our circumstances, some of us took to letter-writing; but our epistles were such lagubrious affairs, breathing little else than discontent, that they were worthier the flames than the care of the general post-master. Not having exhausted our complaints by writing them, we began talking of our grievances, and grew, as people always do in such discourse, wonderfully confidential. It would seem that we had all suffered more or less from 'the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune,' or from 'the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes;' verily, we must have been an unfortunate or an ill-used set. All but Uncle Robert — our hostess's and everybody's Uncle Robert, otherwise called Our Philosopher — who, though not a great talker, was still less of a grumbler; and did often enliven us with a pleasant anecdote or shrewd remark, very much to the purpose of whatever our discourse might be. Yet he who was no grumbler was the oldest of our party, and one whose life had, truth to tell, been deeply shadowed. He had lost a princely fortune by the wrong-headedness of a speculating partner; death had deprived him of a beloved wife; and worldly prudence had driven from his side three noble-hearted sons, the only sur-

vivors of a large family. 'Perhaps,' asks some one, 'this Uncle Robert had lukewarm feelings, and did not really suffer from these severe trials?' Nay, if you had marked his quivering lip and glistening eye when news came from the pestilential shores of Africa, or a gazette from the burning East, or a letter from unsettled and unpoised Australia, you would not have doubted the warmth of his parental love, nor the acuteness of his feelings.

He was sitting, book in hand; but though his eyes were bent down, their adjunct, a pair of spectacles, was thrown up, resting upon his broad forehead, instead of upon that feature which, in the old fable, was so consequential about claiming the right to the same.

'What are you reading, Uncle Robert?' said our hostess with a smile.

'I am not reading, my dear niece,' he replied; 'I have been dreaming all the morning.'

'Dreaming! Why, you have not been asleep surely, and we chattering all the time?' she continued, taking the book from his hand in a playful manner.

'Indeed I have not. But do you suppose it is only the young who are allowed to have *waking dreams*? We old people fashion them, no doubt, in a very different manner. There is nothing Arcadian or Utopian about them, I grant; they are made up of the recollection of facts rather than of the pencillings of fancy, and yet perhaps they are almost as airy as the beautiful 'baseless fabrics' the young so delight to build. Shall I tell my morning's dream for the edification of you discontented mortals?'

‘Oh do, pray do,’ was echoed through the circle; and we drew round to form an attentive audience.

‘I shall not stay to inquire,’ began Our Philosopher, ‘if there be a young gentleman of our party who thinks himself a remarkably unfortunate and ill-used person, because his relations have thought proper to find for him a government situation, with a regularly increasing salary sufficient to supply every reasonable want, instead of advancing for his use a certain amount of capital, from the nucleus of which he is morally certain he should have become a second Rothschild.’

Here our flute-player looked up with a flushed cheek, for the cap fitted *him*, indeed more tightly than was pleasant; but he had the good feeling to know that youth cannot be offended by the kindly rebuke of age, and he caught Uncle Robert’s eye with a good-humored smile, as our monitor continued.

‘Nor is this all. He entertains an extraordinary delusion that he has an especial talent for money-making, whereas he has only elegant tastes which would direct the money-spending. He has a decided contempt for money itself, apart from its noble purposes of benevolence, and encouragement to industry of head and hand; and for this I am one to honor him. But I shrewdly suspect your thorough money-maker is too often made of different stuff, and feels some idolatry towards the yellow god itself. Remember I say too often, not always; for some of our merchant princes spend their revenues in a truly noble manner. The delusion of our discontented one is, moreover, very curious. He scorns the patient labor and unremitting toil, and all the very arts which yet

he thinks *he* should so successfully practise ; and there are about half-a-dozen individuals in the metropolis whom he only knows by name, who are yet the objects of his supreme envy. Now, in my waking dream, I thought that the mind of one of these persons and his own were revealed to each other, and held a sort of spiritual communion—a spiritual communion, although a bodily meeting, as if they were under a bond to exchange the deepest secrets of their hearts. This meeting, by the way, was in a dark, dingy, dusty counting-house, instead of at the superb villa at which the discontented one had pictured the wealthy merchant enjoying every appurtenance to refined intellectual enjoyment and bodily comfort. The visitor seated himself on a hard, tall, uneasy leathern stool, while the merchant spoke to him from his accustomed niche, where he sat before a high desk, which was separated from the rest of the apartment by a light railing. He leaned his elbow on a closed cheque-book, and looked at the youth with a grave, nay, a sad expression of countenance.

‘ You are thinking,’ said the Spirit of the merchant, ‘ that the height of human bliss would be to have the power of converting these leaves of paper, by a few strokes of the pen, to the value of thousands of pounds ; you are dreaming of doubling and tripling them by successful speculations.’

‘ And also,’ said the Spirit of the youth involuntarily, ‘ of spending some of the money on a visit to Italy—a pilgrimage to the Eternal City. Oh,’ he continued with a sigh, ‘ in my unhappy condition, I cannot hope, for years to come, to spare either money

or time for this realization of my youth's fondest wish.'

'I know all the thoughts of your mind,' pursued the Spirit of the merchant; 'and though I am dead to all such aspirations, I remember them well enough to *envy you* your fresh unbroken spirits, your calm unfevered life, and regular hours of relaxation.'

'But you have wealth,' returned the youth; 'why not retire from the turmoil which I now perceive has rendered your hair grey before its time, has wrinkled your brow prematurely, and withered up the spiritual aspirations which, twenty years ago, resembled my own?'

'Examine my heart more narrowly,' said the merchant's Spirit in rather an angry tone, 'and you will cease to talk so like a fool. Don't you perceive I am one of the so-called rich, whose wealth is credit? If I cease for a day to plan and bargain, the machinery stops, and all is lost. I can scrawl here five figures in a row, and the draft will be honored. What then? I can only, as it were, pass the money from one pocket to another — embark it in some other speculation. For my family's use, or my own private pleasure, it is often excessively inconvenient to write one and two ciphers after it.'

'I perceive, however,' continued the youth, 'that you have a wife and family — the objects with me of a romantic ambition; indeed I think you married when little older than I am now.'

'Take off another layer of appearances,' answered the merchant's Spirit, 'and you will discover that I married an extravagant woman, solely for the small

fortune she possessed, with which I began the world. In our frequent quarrels, she always tauntingly reminds me that everything is hers ; and really my splendid mansion is so associated in my mind with discomfort and contention, that I feel far more at home on "Change," or in this dingy counting-house, than anywhere else. I bear with your folly,' continued the merchant, 'because you remind me of a dear son, for whom I am struggling and striving to carve out a happier fate than my own has been.'

'But,' said the Spirit of the youth, 'it is not because *you* have secret cares that the wealth of every merchant is but credit, and that every one of them has an unloving wife.'

'Certainly not ; and though I feel a degree of envy for such as you, with youth, health, and, in human probability, a calm life before them, with sufficient leisure and freedom from heavy care, with the privilege of choosing a partner for life, I have often caught myself envying my seemingly more fortunate companions in business. Yet who knows, if our spirits could hold this intimate communion with theirs, we might discover they, too, had sorrows.'

There was a pause. 'Ah,' said the merchant at last, 'I see you are growing more contented with your lot ; and as this makes me envy you more, I had rather not examine your mind any further ; especially as it is very necessary I should seem unruffled, alike to hide satisfaction at my gains, and chagrin at my losses.' 'And thus,' said Uncle Robert, speaking in his own person, 'the first scene of my waking dream

melted away — gradually discovering — shall I tell it you? — a second.'

'Oh yes,' was echoed by all, though perhaps we each trembled with the thought of being the next exemplar.

'In the second scene of my waking dream,' continued Uncle Robert, looking, as he spoke, at the youngest of our party, 'I beheld a bright-eyed girl, of about, I suppose, seventeen, without a real trouble or sorrow in the world — unless, indeed, the loss of her mother, when she was an infant, may still be called so — who fancied herself cruelly used, because her stepmother still exercised parental authority over her; apportioning the occupation of her time, directing her reading, and even the choice of her companions. She fancies she could have submitted to even a harsher government from her own mother, but feels sure *she* would not have exercised her power half so tyrannically. Her regret for her parent, and affection for this ideal of a mother, we all can understand and admire; but just now the especial objects of her envy are a family of giddy girls, who, like herself, are motherless, but who, unlike her, have escaped from control, salutary or not. It is true that she does not think, if she had equal liberty, she should abuse it by idling her time in the manner she confesses they do; but she longs for the liberty, nevertheless, if only to prove her wisdom. Now, in my dream, the Spirit of this young girl, was wafted away from the well-ordered home, which she sometimes calls a prison; away from the neat chamber, well stocked with books, which she calls her own; away from her birds and flowers — to a

poverty-stricken dwelling in the heart of a great city. The poverty was of that sort which is the most painful to witness, not the humble, almost contented, poverty which strives to limit wants and wishes to the means, but the poverty which is proud, and ashamed of itself.

‘A haggard woman, really about five-and-twenty, but looking middle-aged, was there; and two sickly children, one in her arms, one clinging to her dress. Thus spoke the Spirit of the woman to the young girl — for, in my dream, they were able to read each other’s hearts.

“You envy those whose days are passing away, to my mind, like an early scene, from the drama of my own life. I, too, was motherless from an infant, but my father gave me no stepdame; he consoled himself in a very different fashion — was seldom in his house — made no *home* of it. I was left to servants and hireling teachers, all chosen carelessly. I was my own mistress, indeed, and steered my course to — a whirlpool. Ignorance, Vanity, and Self-will, were my pilots, without a warning voice to tell me of a beacon. My father was reputed rich, and I had many suitors; but I, who had never been controlled, and so had never learned to control myself, would not be guided in my choice, would not give up my will. I was just your age when I eloped with one, worthy perhaps of me, but quite unworthy any nobler specimen of womanhood. I never believed my father would withhold his pardon and a provision; but when we discovered my mistake, my wretchedness began. My expected fortune had been the lure; I was soon treated with contempt, and, by degrees, with all the harshness and

cruelty that a brutal nature is capable of inflicting on the helpless. My husband's bad character excludes me from worthier associates than his companions ; my father's doors are shut against me ; gnawing poverty and mutual hatred rule our wretched household. I am still young, but I have only hope in the grave. Read my heart more closely ; it is more fit for you to read now than it was in my girlhood." I thought,' continued Uncle Robert, 'that there was a long pause, and that the two looked into each other's faces. At last the woman spoke again.

"I can read," said she, "*your* past clearly, and can look into your probable future. I can see how, in your childish illnesses, the stepmother watched by your bedside, and pillowed your feverish head upon her bosom ; how, in those days, you loved her very dearly, and knowing no difference, called her 'mother.' I can see, too, how she loved you almost as much, and tended you quite as carefully as in later days she has loved and tended her own child. I can see, too, how the self-willed, self-governing cousins, whom you so much envy, first corrupted your mind against her ; and never did she more truly prove that she was good, and wise, and kind, than by striving to keep you apart. I can see in the future that she will guide your half-sister just as she has striven to guide you. I see, too, in those coming days, that you will have a happy home of your own, in the governing of which you will often seek her advice ; for by that time you will understand her excellence, and thank her for her care ; a care which almost precludes the possibility of your choosing an unworthy husband, since high character is the only

passport to your acquaintance. Oh," sighed the Spirit, "how I envy your lot! How delicious does your flower-strewn path appear? How sweet the security of your present bondage to my wrung repentant heart!"

The monitor paused, and the fair girl to whom he had rather particularly addressed himself, rose with tearful eyes, and passing her arm round Uncle Robert's neck — he *was her* uncle — pressed a kiss upon his forehead, and whispered, ere she left the room, 'I go to ask her forgiveness of all my petulance; I will write to her — again I will call her mother. She will forgive as she has forgiven, and she shall feel that I am changed — am humbled — am grateful. And you, Uncle Robert, you shall think better of me. Nay, I must go,' and she hastened away to hide her emotion.

The tears of the pretty little maiden had thrown a gloom upon the party, and even Our Philosopher himself seemed somewhat affected.

'I know,' said a gentleman of the party, twisting some closely written paper into all imaginable shapes, and offering himself in a good-humored manner for the amusement (and instruction?) of the company — 'I know there must have been a third scene to your dream, for I was the grumbler-in-chief this morning. Do tell me, dear Uncle Robert, most sage philosopher, to what Spirit you introduced mine?'

'To the Spirit of the author,' returned our monitor, smiling again, 'whose fame you, one of the *dilettanti* of literature, and a man of fortune, do, beyond all things, covet. The ode you have written to him really deserves

better treatment than it is receiving at your hands ; for though it speaks only of the laurel wreath, without one allusion to the poison which may be distilled therefrom, it is a very respectable production, and would be a graceful accompaniment to the pecuniary present you are wishing to offer him. You know he is poor, but, like many of the rich, have a very vague idea of his sort of poverty — a poverty very different from that of the woman which I described, for his fame really shines the brighter that he is still poor ; that he has resisted every temptation to sell his splendid talents for party purposes. Yet, surrounded by the beloved ones who look up to him for bread — bread to be earned by the sweat of the brain — think how hard it must have been always to have said “No.” On the one hand ease and abundance, on the other toil and privation. It is only lately this fame you so covet has been acknowledged ; think of the long struggling years of obscurity through which he waded ; the enmity of those he would not serve ; the “hope deferred” and sickness of heart. Could your proud spirit so alternately have bent and battled ? would you have come as he has done, to the glorious belief, that “The Wages of every noble Work do yet lie in Heaven, or else Nowhere ?” Verily, he may be envied, but would you live over his life, and so pay the price of his happiness ?

‘Such fame ! What can the world bestow that is comparable to it ?’ returned the author of the ode.

‘Think of your own fame,’ interrupted a lively lady, and counting as she spoke upon her fingers ; ‘first, you wrote a prize essay at Oxford, then you contributed poetry to one annual and to three county news-

papers; and since then you must have enriched at least a thousand albums with your effusions.'

'To be rebuked at last for my ambition,' said our author, taking the irony in good part; 'well, one thing, at least, I will strive to be, the appreciator—the encourager of genius. Will this please you, my dear philosopher?'

'Your hand upon the promise. And take an old man's word for it, you will be the thing more useful than the man of genius himself: for one appreciator can encourage and foster many of those who only want a helping hand.'

And so ended Our Philosopher's Dream. And behold, while it was telling, the weather had cleared, the rain was over, or, as I heard a little girl say, 'it was used up.' Whether it was the result of the dream or the sunshine, I cannot tell, but certainly all our discontent was over. A walk in the grounds we must have, thick shoes provided. How sweet the carnations smelt after the rain! Even we were in good humor with the snails, who crawled—no, galloped as they always do on such occasions—across our path, though we knew them to be on the high road to assert their prior claim to the peaches and nectarines. Did not *this* alone prove the general contentedness of heart and toleration of spirit induced by Uncle Robert's dream and—the sunshine?

THE NEGLECTED CHILD.

‘SEE what beautiful flowers Mrs. Woodley has given us!’ exclaimed, almost at the same moment, Augusta and Caroline Shelton, as they entered their mother’s drawing-room after a morning’s walk; ‘but we wish to give them to you, mamma, if you will accept them,’ continued the children in set phrase, and with an air of affectation that would have been anything but pleasing to a more discreet mother.

‘My darlings,’ replied Mrs. Shelton, rising languidly from the sofa, and drawing the children towards her; ‘my sweet girls never forget dear mamma, do they? And what did Mrs. Woodley say to you, my dears?’

‘She did not say much,’ returned Augusta, a prim womanly miss of fourteen years old, and the eldest of the family; ‘but she told us to gather some flowers if we liked, and asked us to have a ride on the pony; but of course we did not mount, because we thought it might crease these clean frocks, and that would have displeased you. Margaret, however, rode him round and round the paddock.’

‘Of course; she has no thought.’

‘But Margaret had not a clean frock on, mamma,’

said Caroline, who was a degree more childlike than the other, and sometimes, though not often, put in a kind word for her neglected sister.

‘Never mind, my love; you and Augusta shall go out with me this afternoon; that will be much better than pony-riding.’

At this moment a loud sobbing was heard at the door, and the next instant Margaret Shelton, the youngest daughter, entered the room, accompanied by her constant companion, Rover, a large spaniel, whose collar was now ornamented with fresh flowers, very similar to those the favored children had just presented to their mother. Margaret was about eleven years old; and though her complexion was less delicate, and her features less regular, than those of her sisters, intelligence beamed brightly and surely from her dark eyes; and feeling, sentiment, and suffering had already imprinted their characters on her countenance.

‘What is the matter now — crying again?’ said Mrs. Shelton in no very gentle tone.

‘Morris, Nurse Morris is so very ill,’ sobbed the poor child.

‘And will your crying make her better?’

‘Oh, mamma, do send for a doctor,’ said Margaret, endeavoring to stifle her tears; for she felt instinctively that a storm was gathering, and that she should be reproached as the cause of innumerable calamities, if her grief disturbed the delicate ‘nerves,’ or rather temper, of her capricious parent.

Mr. Simmonds is too busy to come before to-morrow; and why cannot you call people by their names, instead of using that vulgar phrase, ‘send for a doctor?’

But I suppose they are Morris's own words; you pick up everything from the servants.'

The rebuked child stooped down to fondle the dog, and hide the tears which she had failed to drive back, while her sisters exchanged glances that seemed to say, '*She does not bring mamma a nosegay.*'

Mrs. Shelton read the glance, and had before observed the flowers which, loosely twined round the dog's collar, were now dropping about the floor.

'Come, clear away this litter,' she exclaimed, addressing Margaret; 'you and Rover and Morris are only fit company for each other, I think. Your sisters, indeed, thought of their mother first, and preferred bringing *her their* flowers to dressing up a dog with them.'

Another rush of tears from poor Margaret was the rejoinder, as she sobbed out — 'Last — last — time — mamma — you would not have my flow — flowers.'

'I cannot bear this noise; go away,' said Mrs. Shelton, with a wave of her hand; and Margaret, picking up the flowers which she ventured to leave on the table, hastened to obey. The dog followed her, and in a few minutes the 'neglected child' was sitting upon the old nurse's bed, where Rover had mounted also, as if for the purpose of licking the hand of his weeping mistress, and offering her his mute consolations.

Mrs. Shelton was considered in society 'fascinating,' and a 'beauty;' but, in truth, she was vain, selfish, and capricious. Her husband was a shrewd worldly-minded man, with a much smaller proportion of the ballast of principle than needs belong even to such a character. A pair of this kind were not likely to

regulate their household very admirably; and the advent of poor little Margaret had been most unpropitious. In the first place, a boy had been ardently desired, for whom doubtless had been reserved a share of that sort of affection which capricious people can only bestow, and which had been lavished already in due proportion on the elder girls. But this formed no inheritance for the unwelcome little girl, on whom fell the additional calamity of receiving a baptismal name unpleasing to the ears of an influential elder of the family, who, with a consistency, it would seem, inherent in the race, took a dislike to the poor infant forthwith, and was heard to declare that no one of that name (he had been jilted by a Margaret in his youth) should ever touch a farthing of his money. Brothers, however, in due time appeared, and they finally jostled poor Margaret from any slight hold she might have had on the parental tenderness. From babyhood she had been as it were a shuttlecock in the house, tossed to and fro by every gale of temper; blamed, scolded, punished often; but caressed and petted seldom, or never, except by her constant friend Nurse Morris, to whose affection, ill-directed though it might sometimes be, she was indebted for almost every word or act of kindness she could remember.

The illness of old Nurse Morris became more and more alarming; and when the busy Mr. Simmonds found time to pay her a visit, he looked grave, and ordered those prompt remedies which startle even the thoughtless and indifferent into the consciousness that death must be hovering near. Margaret was sitting on the

stairs watching Mr. Simmonds's departure on the occasion of his second or third visit to poor Morris.

'Sir— Mr. Simmonds,' she exclaimed, as she crept after him into the hall, resolutely checking her tears, because she had been so often told not to cry when she was speaking to any one — 'do tell me, Sir, if nurse is going to die.'

'Little girls should not ask such questions,' replied the doctor, scarcely looking at the child, and since she had so effectually concealed her feelings, not at all aware of the anguish of her young heart.

The language of contempt was nothing new to her, and yet a flash of something like anger and scorn might have been detected from those dark eyes, had there been any one near to read such a sign, as she turned away once more to plant herself beside the old servant's bed. In a few minutes, however, she was summoned to 'lessons,' which, to the astonishment of the governess, were so accurately prepared, that she made some remarks on the subject.

'You told me,' replied the child, trembling with fear, lest she should be deprived of the promised reward, that if there were no mistake, I might stay all day with Morris.' What a pity, that when Margaret Shelton was called idle, obstinate, and self-willed, her parents — and, copying them, her teachers — never thought of the sweet and simple plan of ruling her through her affections!

'I know I shall not live many days,' said the old nurse, when it happened that she was alone with Margaret; 'and there is much, my poor pet, that I want to say to you. Now, don't cry, but listen,' she con-

tinued. 'I made my will long ago, and I have left you near upon five hundred pounds that is in the bank, part of it prize-money my poor old husband got in the war-time, and partly my own savings. Now, remember it is to be yours either when you are of age, or when you marry, whichever happens first; and though you are young to talk of such things, remember old nurse's words; get a good husband as soon as you can, for it's my belief you'll never have a bit of peace or comfort at home.'

'Oh, nurse, nurse!' interrupted the poor girl, 'if you die, what will become of me? Nobody loves me but you—nobody ever did love me but you.' And she threw her arms wildly round the old woman's neck.

'I know that,' returned Morris, who, though an affectionate creature, it will be perceived had little or no governing principle. 'I know that, and I have only stayed in the house all these years for your sake. They don't love you, and that's the fact; but never mind: don't you care about them. I think you're just as pretty as your petted sisters, and I dare say some day some one else will think so too. And now you must remember they cannot keep the money away from you; and you're to have my gold watch; here it is—you know it—it goes capitally, though it is large and old-fashioned, and not like such as ladies wear; but you'll keep it for old nurse's sake, wont you?'

'That I will,' sobbed Margaret, 'and never part with it.'

'And here,' continued Morris, drawing an old pocket from under her pillow, 'is a matter of twenty pounds

in notes, gold, and silver ; they may bury me,' she whispered as in a sort of parenthesis, 'out of the wages that are due ; so take it now, and hide it ; you'll find a use for money at odd times, I warrant.' A violent fit of coughing put a stop to the sick woman's words, and perhaps prevented more counsel, which, however well-intentioned, had so much that was pernicious in it. Alas ! why had Mr. and Mrs. Shelton, by their harshness and apathy, thrown their warm-hearted child entirely upon this one affection.

The old servant's prediction was verified. She did not live many days, and her will was found to be exactly as she had declared, with, however, the specification that the interest of the 'near upon' five hundred pounds was to accumulate until one of the events to which she had alluded — namely, Margaret's marriage, or coming of age — should take place. Meanwhile the sorrow-stricken child unpractised in deception, and no willing pupil in the art, even though instructed in it by the dying lips of her beloved nurse, felt oppressed by the weight of her secret — the hoard contained in the old pocket. She might have concealed it easily, but her nature was too ingenuous long to do so.

It was well known that Nurse Morris was worth money, and it is very likely that rumor had exaggerated the amount. It is likely, too, that Mr. and Mrs. Shelton were not blind to the probability of her leaving her savings among the children she had helped to rear ; for she had often declared that she had not a relation in the world. But they were quite startled to find their least loved Margaret the old servant's sole

heiress. Alas! the fact was treated as a new offence, and a new phase of suffering was shown to her; for certainly she never before could have been an object of envy to her elder sisters. I believe, however, that the present possession of the large old-fashioned gold watch was, and not unnaturally, a something more coveted than Margaret's future expectations. Certainly a watch is the gift most longed for, both by boy and girl, even though a timepiece may mark the hours in every chamber of their dwelling; and often is it the last possession that poverty wrings from man or woman. Margaret, thus endowed, took a sort of childish precedence over the spoiled and selfish pair, which they could ill endure; while on her part she was so unused to have any advantage over them, that she was quite unconscious of the feelings her legacy had engendered; besides her poor little heart as yet was wrung with grief for the loss of her much-loved nurse.

It was the day after the old servant's funeral when Margaret crept softly into the drawing-room. 'Mamma, may I come in?' she asked as she entered.

'Yes, if you will be as quiet as your sisters are.'

This was not very warm encouragement; but, accustomed as the poor child was to rebuke, it was anything but a repulse.

'Mamma, I have a secret to tell you,' she continued, her voice trembling from many causes; 'will you take care of some money for me — some money poor Morris gave me just before she died, though she told me to keep it for myself? But it would be wrong not to tell you, I know.'

'Give it me this instant!' replied Mrs. Shelton, her

ire rapidly kindling; 'why, you naughty girl, you deceitful little creature, what do you think you deserve for all this slyness? Good gracious me! nineteen pounds odd shillings; you wicked little creature, to hide all this money for a week!' And by the time her harangue had proceeded thus far, the lady's passion had so risen, that she seized poor Margaret by the shoulder, shook her for a minute, and as her combativeness reached its climax, gave her a box on the ear which almost threw her down.

'It was wrong, mamma,' sobbed the poor child; 'but oh, pray do forgive me! It was nurse ——' But here she checked her words; for she felt it would be easier to bear reproaches directed against herself than reproof of the dead. It was too late, however; for Mrs. Shelton, quick at surmises, had already divined the truth.

'An old good-for-nothing creature,' exclaimed Mrs. Shelton: 'it was she, I suppose, who told you to hide the money, and taught you all sorts of deceit. You are much too young to have any money at all; I shall not give you a farthing of it. And to punish you for such naughtiness, I shall take away the watch till you know how to behave yourself.'

Margaret's anguish would have melted any softer heart than that of a silly, ill-tempered woman; for silliness, for want of the power of thought and sympathy, is usually unfeeling. But the sort of anguish that proceeds from the blight of a young nature, from the misapprehension of its motives, and the utter want of all appreciation of its best emotions, is very apt to harden the character. Grief has a maturing hand;

the mind is instructed through the feelings much more than we commonly acknowledge ; and when, after a week of silent suffering, the cherished watch was restored to Margaret Shelton — because, as she very well knew, the possession of it no longer rendered her an object of envy to her more favored sisters, since they had been presented with small fashionable watches, purchased with the hoard of which she had been deprived — she was no longer the child whose heart was all tendrils, and whose character was as wax to mould.

It was some little time after this, that, in examining an old note-case, part of the contents of the pocket which she had been permitted to keep, more carefully than she had done before, she discovered a sovereign between its folds. No doubt it had been part of the hoard which had slipped accidentally into its hiding-place ; but this accession of wealth was a serious trouble to poor Margaret. To keep it, or to take it to her mother, she was equally afraid ; and to spend it, she dared not, since she, who had never any money of her own, could not make purchases without exciting suspicion. From the harshness and misapprehension which had driven the neglected child to turn her thoughts inwardly, and seek counsel only of herself, she had at least acquired the power of deciding quickly ; and the resolution she came to was, that she would take an opportunity, when walking out, to hang back from her companions, and give the sovereign to a certain poor woman, a crossing-sweeper, whom they often encountered. She would thus, she argued, have the satisfaction of feeling that it would do some good, while she should escape all risk of that

blame which would have fallen on her almost equally, had she spent, acknowledged — for her ignorance of its possession would not have been believed — or been found out in hoarding the piece of gold. It was a childlike plan; for a more experienced person might have foreseen that some eloquent demonstration of gratitude from the poor sweeper, or other circumstance, would probably betray the munificence of her gift. And so it fell out; for the poor woman, who was an honest creature, knew the family by sight; and believing the sovereign must have been given her by mistake, and yet, as it was wrapped in paper, not having discovered its value in time to run after the child, for she was lame, she prudently and properly brought it to the house; and asking to see Mrs. Shelton, the whole affair came to light.

The scene which followed was beyond description. The old crossing-sweeper was rewarded for her honesty with a few shillings, and dismissed; but though, of course, she knew little of the circumstances which had led to Margaret's gift, she saw and heard enough to make an indelible impression on her mind, and one which, as we shall find in the sequel, led to important results.

'Mamma, mamma, I should have given it to you,' repeated the child over and over again; 'but I was afraid you would have thought I had kept it on purpose, and would have scolded and punished me. Indeed, indeed, I am speaking truth.'

But Margaret was not believed. Nay, she was suspected of having further hoards. Every likely place was searched; and many an opprobrious epithet

was hurled on the head of the defenceless child by the irritated temper of a weak woman. This was a second era in the life of Margaret Shelton, another ordeal through which she passed, and by which her character was moulded and hardened. And if I have dwelt perhaps too long on these childish incidents, it is because I have a firm belief that the virtue, happiness, and moral advancement of the next generation depend so wonderfully on the training of the present children, that no child is too young, or in position too obscure, to exercise in the future an influence for good or evil, according to the impressions which are made on its malleable nature. To treat a child with caprice, to rob it of its own self-respect by doubting its word, (unless under rare circumstances,) to deny it that sympathy for which it silently asks, are those evil deeds of the unthinking which bring about as grave and disastrous results as any mistakes of active politicians.

From the time of her nurse's death, and its immediate consequences, any observing person would have marked a decided change in Margaret Shelton. She was no longer a tearful child, apparently yearning for affection, and thus meeting with constant rebuffs; nay, she seldom demonstrated regard for anything except the dog Rover, which was now growing old, and did not live above a year or two. She acquired her allotted lessons with that calm indifference which gave no encouragement to teachers to take much trouble with her, especially as they found a quicker reward for their labor in adding to the showy accomplishments of the elder sisters — a mode of proceeding which drew down money and praise. And thus time passed

on ; the best part of Margaret's education consisting in the desultory sort of reading in which she contrived to indulge ; and the age of sixteen found her grown, by slow degrees, into something much more like the waiting-maid of her elder sisters than their companion. That she did not visit with them, was said to be on account of her youth ; and the same reason was offered for her simpler and less expensive dress. But two, three years rolled away. She became much older than they were when first ushered into society, yet no change was there in her destiny. Meanwhile the weak, unjust, and silly mother found no improvement in her own temper proceed from disappointment ; for she had educated her *darlings* solely with the view of their 'getting well married ;' and astonishment and vexation at the continuance of their single blessedness made no little commotion in her mind. Neither were the dispositions of the two young ladies themselves greatly improved by finding themselves less idolized than they had been foolishly led to expect. And, as if a crowning calamity were needed, Mr. Shelton had losses in business, and the family were obliged to retrench ! Poor Margaret ! she was the ready conductor to carry off the storms of temper which arose from every quarter of the domestic herizon ; nor must the selfishness and indifference of her sisters be thought more unnatural than her parents' neglect ; in fact, they had come to consider her as in quite a different position from their own.

It was the autumn of the year ; and though, in consideration of his reduced finances, Mr. Shelton declined taking a house at Brighton, where for many

seasons his wife had insisted on spending a portion of the year, he agreed to a less expensive sojourn at one of the French seaports. Accordingly, early one morning the family embarked. The weather was wet, and the whole party had risen at an hour which they called 'the middle of the night;' neither circumstance being one likely to render pleasant very uncertain tempers. Poor Margaret! she was in the way when not wanted, and absent when called for; in short, she seemed to have done a hundred things she should not have done; and, thus blamed and scolded, no wonder she felt glad, when at ten or eleven o'clock the skies cleared and a brilliant sun shone forth—by which time the steamer was well out at sea—to find a quiet corner on the deck, far away from the family.

She sat apparently musing, absorbed in the contemplation of sea and sky; yet it is very likely that she might have been observed by many of the passengers, although she scarcely noticed them; for though plainly, almost childishly dressed for her age, there was a natural grace in her figure, and though not strictly handsome, she had a sweet and gentle expression of countenance, which often pleased more than beauty. Presently one of her young brothers came hurriedly towards her—'Oh, here you are!' he exclaimed; 'Mamma says she hopes the box that holds Augusta and Caroline's new bonnets has not got wet, and she says you had better look after it, for you know where the luggage was put;' and having already struck up an intimate acquaintance with the man at the helm, to

whom he was extremely anxious to return, the boy ran off without waiting for an answer.

Margaret was accustomed to obedience, and she instantly rose to make the required investigation ; indeed her seat had been very near the pile of luggage, and she thought she could already discover from beneath the tarpauling a corner of the important box safe and dry. She was mistaken, however, though she knew it must be near that spot, and fancied that if she could push on one side, even to the distance of a few inches, a heavy package which impeded her view, she should ascertain the fact. At the instant of her attempting this, a young man, whom she remembered had sat near her for some time, stepped forward to assist her ; but, alas ! though she quickly discovered her sisters' bonnet box was safe, a heavy chest, disturbed by the movement, fell upon her foot, bruising it very severely, and causing her the most exquisite pain.

A fine and sentimental young lady would certainly have fainted, or shrieked, or in some other approved manner have rendered herself conspicuous on becoming the object of such a catastrophe. Margaret, however, was too well accustomed to self-reliance, and to endurance — had been so little in the habit of receiving sympathy — that though the pain was excessive, she endured it with the virtue of a martyr. The young stranger near her, who soon gave his name as Arthur Williams, was struck with the remarkable degree of self-control which she evinced, and earnestly offering his aid, the first link of a chain of sympathy was established, which influenced the future life of both.

Arthur Williams was but three-and-twenty, yet he

looked nearer thirty ; and no physiognomist would have hesitated to declare that he had thought and suffered deeply. And yet there was a strange contradiction in the expression of his handsome countenance, and a faint shade of irresolution about the mouth, which was the index to the fault of his life — a want of firmness to withstand temptation ; so that too often he had known the right, yet done the wrong. Brought up by a weak and foolish mother, who had instilled neither religion nor morals as principles in his mind, Arthur Williams became his own master at sixteen. A small fortune to which her death entitled him, was forestalled by his youthful extravagances before it came legally to hand ; and — to reverse the old-fashioned story-tellers' plan of shrouding every personage in a robe of mystery, until the grand denouement acts as a harlequin's wand to show each in his proper colors — I will frankly own, that when he encountered Margaret Shelton, he was flying to the continent with an equally guilty companion, to evade the consequences of embezzling the money of their employers. He had assumed a name, and by that only need he be known in this narrative. He called his associate — who was more hardened in guilt than Williams, coarser-minded, and every way his inferior — Jackson.

'Why,' exclaimed this companion about an hour after Margaret's accident, 'if it were a time for such fancies, I should really think you had taken a downright liking to that girl — what people call falling in love. Now, it strikes me it might turn out a good spec ; they seem dashing folks, though this pretty little youngest is a dowdy. I have a great mind to pump

the servants, and find out if there is any money. Why, you know, a few hundreds would put all to rights; they wouldn't prosecute if we could refund; they'd know better than that.

'Ay,' replied Williams, 'and life in the New World afterwards with such a companion.'

'Well, try it,' returned the other, 'you know I have got a wife already; and, besides, I am no gentleman — she wouldn't have me.'

Jackson by feigning himself to be Arthur Williams's servant, did find out a great deal concerning the Sheltons — the truth, and something more than the truth, about them. For the domestics, as is not unusual, had no very clear sense of truth, and chose to increase their own importance by adding to the worldly fortunes of the family, and in particular giving an original version to the story of Morris's legacy, which was multiplied by four at least.

Arthur Williams was not a thorough villain. His was a character even more painful to contemplate. His associate, Jackson, could not comprehend that, in seeking Margaret Shelton, he had any thought but that of obtaining her property; but it was not so; for before many weeks had elapsed, he loved her with the ardor and sincerity of deep affection. Then indeed was it that the agony of remorse for his past misdeeds and blighted character tortured him almost to madness.

But I must return for a moment to that eventful day on the steamboat. The lameness consequent on Margaret's accident proved a ready excuse for a thousand attentions during the remainder of the voyage, while

the accident itself was the medium of a self-introduction on Arthur Williams's part to her family. As the hours passed on, and the voyagers became more and more weary, Margaret was more completely neglected by her mother and sisters, more entirely thrown on the stranger's care. And there was something so strange in hearing any one speak kindly to her, or of being the object of solicitude, that she perceived not the gulf over which she was impending.

The acquaintance thus commenced, Arthur Williams took care to improve; and few circumstances offer more facilities for this sort of chance intimacy than the idle lounging of a watering-place. Yet the Sheltons, who had a great deal of purse-pride, and a sort of vanity rather than any higher feeling, which disinclined them from associating with those of doubtful reputation, were by no means satisfied with all they saw of young Williams. But *it was too late*. Margaret having been left uninstructed in the necessity for exercising caution, in giving encouragement to a stranger of whom little or nothing was known — ignorant of the calamities which so frequently ensue from misplaced confidence — perhaps flattered, and at least pleased, with the attentions bestowed upon her, had already yielded up her affections. Not to delay the history of this sad affair—in two months from her meeting with Arthur Williams, Margaret Shelton left her home for ever, taking with her only the clothes she wore, and the ponderous watch, which was still fondly cherished.

Before the marriage, Arthur Williams was aware of the real amount of the old nurse's legacy; but as I

have already said, though stained by crime, he had still enough of humanity left to love her truly and devotedly. Had she been penniless, he would have been unselfish enough to refrain from asking her to share his wretched fortunes; but he now looked forward to her few hundreds releasing him from the fate which hung like a drawn sword over his head; while he hopefully and resolutely looked forward to supporting her humbly, but by honest industry, for the future. Alas! what has power to dim the future like the ever-rising mists of past errors!

Arthur's associate had deceived him in the amount of their mutual liabilities, and seizing on the first sums he could touch, the hardened villain made off with it, and left Williams unable to refund the remainder. Now the truth must have been revealed to Margaret, though of how she bore the shock there is no chronicle. It is only known that she clung to her husband through all trials, and that she humbled herself to apply to her offended family for assistance—an application which met only a stern and brief refusal.

What a year of agony that must have been which followed the ill-omened marriage!—in wretched poverty, and hiding from the officers of justice. Yet amid all this misery a child was born—the sole heir of its unhappy parents' love; for affection still reigned in their hearts; and these young creatures, whatever their separate errors had been, were still true to each other. The latter part of that year they were hidden in London; for Williams had been induced to return to England by the sanguine representations of the greater villain, Jackson.

Margaret's infant was about two months old when the threatened blow fell ; when her husband's hiding-place was discovered, and he was dragged from the humble home, which yet by constant industry he had, under his assumed name, contrived to provide, to answer the charges of fraud and embezzlement which were brought against him. Proofs were abundant ; there was no chance of escape — no mitigating circumstance that might tend to lighten his punishment — and a few weeks saw poor Margaret the wife of a convicted felon — her husband under sentence of transportation for life ! Bitterly, bitterly did she pay for the one act of disobedience — the wretched marriage — the more wretched because she truly loved and was beloved. But oh, how much more dark the fault of those whose cold neglect and cruel caprice had turned back on her own heart the fountains of natural affection, which, when they found a channel, flowed with irresistible force !

Used as such persons are to heart-rending scenes, the officers about the prison were touched at the deep misery of Arthur Williams and his wife ; and it was after the last permitted interview — the fearful parting — that Margaret encountered an old woman, who addressed her with some words of sympathy, and made herself known as that some time crossing-sweeper, to whom the unhappy child had given the sovereign she dared not keep. In rags and poverty she still was, and in deeper misery too ; for though passing honest herself, a wretched ignorant child, now grown to manhood, had failed to withstand the temptations of want, and

lay in a neighboring cell to that of Arthur Williams, convicted of some petty theft.

Associated as she had been with guilt, yet Margaret shuddered anew amid her anguish; it seemed as if another nerve were laid open to torture, to feel a new humiliation. Yet the woman meant neither presumption nor rudeness; she had a grateful recollection of Margaret's childish gift. Unregarded herself, she had watched her for years. She knew her in a moment, and had contrived in some tell-tale manner, before addressing her, to learn the cause of her great and absorbing grief.

'Oh, ma'am,' whispered the woman, 'if you have money enough to follow the ship a little while, I do believe they would take you on board. I did hear of a wife that so softened the captain's heart, that he took her on board; and though I've heard tell that she never saw her husband till they arrived in foreign parts, she had the comfort of knowing she was near him. And when they did land, oh, they met then; and when by good behavior he had won some favor, they lived comfortably enough, as I have heard tell.'

It was a wild tale, with probably but a slight foundation of truth. Yet no wonder that the idea came like a ray of hope and light to the despairing wife.

One more application to her family was made for a trifling sum of money; but the disgrace she had heaped upon them was the reproach which alone she received for answer. In truth, it did seem that, on the public exposure consequent on Arthur Williams's trial, two worldly suitors of her worldly sisters had each cleverly contrived to evade his engagement, or rather the fulfil-

ment of something that was implied as one, if not positively so, rather than make such a 'disgraceful connection.' Darkly and strangely, in blighting the prospects of their best-loved children, worked the instrument which their own faults had prepared wherewith to scourge them.

It was a dull and chill December day when a certain convict-ship, freighted with guilt and misery, weighed anchor. The wind was fair, the sails were spread, and rapidly did it lessen to a speck on the horizon. Yet for many a weary hour a small boat followed in its track. It contained only two rowers, with a young woman and her infant. It was Margaret and her child, the sale of the long-preserved watch having afforded her the means of casting all her earthly future on the hazard of one chance.

But the day was waning, and the rough-mannered yet kind-hearted rowers exchanged significant glances. They felt the chase was hopeless, but they knew the motive of the pursuit, and were willing to strain every nerve to reach the vessel. Yet the thing was impossible, and gradually the dreadful truth dawned on the mind of the desolate being before them. Never have those weather-beaten sailors forgotten her countenance. She seemed stunned with despair; they say that twice or thrice a single tear rolled down her cheek, falling upon her poor sickly baby's face; but there was no violent demonstration of her grief. They remembered, too, that for a long time she looked fixedly at the infant, while it, unconscious creature, faintly smiled, playing with a band of its young mother's *grey* hair which had escaped from its confinement. How the ocean had

been linked with her latter destiny ! The meeting with him who had ruled it ; the dream of passing over its friendly bosom to a friendly land which they had both so often cherished ; and now, the horror of reality, the blank of despair ! Did she think of all these things ? None can tell. But Margaret's nature was a fond and affectionate one. By affection in childhood, she might have been governed ; by misplaced affection in after-years, her fate was sealed. Let charity believe that reason sank beneath the stroke of anguish ' more great than she could bear ! '

Suddenly, too suddenly for prevention on the part of her companions, poor Margaret, clasping still her infant firmly in her arms, leaped from the boat, and in life was seen no more. A large steamer, freighted with many a joyous heart, at the moment, was near ; and although this multiplied the attempts at a rescue, the swell of the water caused by the paddles rendered it more difficult. The bodies were not found for hours. Besides the depositions of the two rowers, many from the deck of that stately vessel witnessed the suicide : there could be no misinterpretation of the fact. It was another brief chronicle, a deep tragedy, added to the many which crowd our newspapers, and of which the happy and prosperous too rarely investigate the causes.

